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OPINION METER

This week's poll:

Is the CNMI government doing enough to cut down on unnecessary spending?

Let your voice be heard! Go to www.saipantribune.com to cast your vote.

151 DAYS without a government budget for FY 2009

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Health Screening

The Philippine Consulate General will be hosting a free health screening for overseas Filipino workers this Sunday.

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Idols Finalists

Nick Mitchell probably won't be having the last laugh on "American Idol."

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Commerce to take over permitting of foreign investors, students. **PAGE 2**

Fitial wants DOI, insular chiefs to back 180-day delay. **PAGE 5**

Group behind fake bills busted

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Secret Service, and local police have busted three persons who were allegedly behind the passing of fake bills at some stores on Saipan.

The federal agents arrested brothers Nestor Camacho Taitano and Lucas Taitano Manglona, and Kisha Lyn Masga King after an indictment was

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DUE TO EXCLUSION OF CHINA FROM VISA WAIVER

Massage parlors see at least 10% revenue cut

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The proposed Saipan Professional Massage Committee yesterday said it expects at least a 10 percent drop in revenue once Chinese tourists stop coming to the CNMI beginning June 1 when they will be required to secure U.S. visas to enter the islands.

"At least 10 percent of revenue will be lost if we lose the Chinese market," said Kin Wan, secretary of the Saipan Professional Massage Committee.

In Garapan, according to Wan, massages for Chinese tourists could go for as low as $10 an hour, whereas in other areas on Saipan, the same ser-

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THAT JAZZY FEEL

MHS Productions members in their debut jazz performance, titled "Roaring '20s," give the crowd something new this year at the Marianas High School Cultural Day festivities yesterday.

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

STIMULUS MONEY

List of possible projects grows

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

The CNMI government continues to identify possible projects that could be funded under the $787 billion stimulus package.

As of Friday afternoon, the projects covering a range of government agencies and departments total more than $338 million.

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

See LIST on Page 4

Understanding the stimulus tax credit

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

Unlike past stimulus tax breaks, not everyone will get a check in the mail this year.

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed into law recently, individuals earning $75,000 or less will receive a $400 tax credit,

See STIMULUS on Page 4

Local

Commerce to take over permitting of foreign investors, students

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The Department of Commerce is now soliciting public comments on the newly released proposed regulations governing foreign investors, foreign retiree investors and foreign students, as well as eligibility requirements for educational institutions intending to enroll foreign students.

Immigration regulations recently transferred these functions to Commerce.

Under the proposed regulations, the responsibilities for processing, approval, issuance, renewal, extension and annual registration of regular term and long term business certificates, foreign investor certificates, retiree investor certificates have been transferred from the Division of Immigration to Commerce.

However, the issuance of the entry permits for these classes of aliens remains the responsibility of Immigration.

Commerce Secretary Michael Ada, in a statement Thursday said the department stands ready to administer the program until the U.S. government takes over local immigration.

"I encourage the general public to review the proposed regulations and submit their comments," he said.

The 30-day public comment period started Thursday.

Until Commerce fully promulgates final immigration regulations for the selected immigration categories, these functions will be administered under current regulations with the Division of Immigration.

The proposed regulations can be accessed via Commerce's website, www.commerce.gov.mp.

The proposed revisions to Commerce's regulations are to make them consistent with the Immigration regulations which became effective on Jan. 1.

Under the proposed regulations, the regular term business certificate fee is $200, while a long term business certificate fee is $1,000.

The fee for foreign investment certificate is $10,000.

Other issues covered by the proposed regulations are the requirements for foreign students and their immediate relatives, to simplify and clarify certain provisions tomake them easier for public use, provide for the annual registration of all foreign investors, and require educational institutions to meet certain criteria prior to enrolling alien students.

CUC makes final payment to Telesource

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. made its final payment of $180,000 in outstanding invoices to Telesource, which operates Tinian's power plant.

CUC executive director Tony Muna yesterday said the utilities agency wrote a check for $180,000 on Feb. 24, ahead of the Feb. 27 deadline to settle its outstanding debt.

"We are now current in our payments," he said.

This is CUC's last monthly dues on a series of $180,000 promissory notes that funded the Tinian plant's construction, maintenance and day to day services.

Last year, CUC and Telesource negotiated the monthly payment plan of some $800,000 in CUC's outstanding debt to the power plant operator. Telesource had said without CUC's payment, Telesource's ability to pay its own third-party loans and buy supplies for the plant such as lubrication oil is threatened.

"We wish to continue our relationship with Telesource," Muna said.

Jeff Barr, general manager of Telesource on Tinian, yesterday said the peak power demand on Tinian is about 5 megawatts, of which 40 to 45 percent goes to the International Broadcasting Bureau.

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Man in helmet attack gets 4-day prison term

The Superior Court has imposed a four-day prison term on a man who seriously injured another by hitting him with a motorcycle helmet on the head outside a nightclub on Tinian.

Associate Judge David A. Wiseman sentenced Luis P. Cruz to five years in prison, all suspended except for four days, for aggravated assault and battery.

Wiseman gave the 42-year-old Cruz credit for the four days he has already served in jail. This means the defendant will no longer spend time in prison.

Wiseman placed the defendant on five years of supervised probation and required him to write a letter of apology to the victim, Jingzhu Cui.

The judge ordered Cruz to pay $10,000 in restitution to Cui, a $300 fine, and $25 assessment fee, plus a probation fee.

Wiseman warned Cruz that failure to make on restitution installment shall constitute a violation of probation and subject to revocation proceedings.

Cruz was directed to report to the Community Guidance Center for an initial evaluation and undergo anger management counseling and substance abuse.

The defendant is barred from possessing or consuming any alcoholic beverages during the five-year probationary period.

Wiseman set a review hearing for June 12, 2009, at 9am at the Tinian Superior Court to determine whether the defendant is complying with the terms and conditions of his sentence.

The Attorney General's Office charged Cruz with assault with a dangerous weapon and aggravated assault and battery.

Cruz and counsel, Joey P. San Nicolas, signed a plea agreement with the government, represented by chief prosecutor Kevin Lynch.

In exchange for pleading guilty to aggravated assault and battery, the government moved to dismiss the remaining charges. Wiseman granted the government's motion.

The factual basis of the plea agreement stated that on April 13, 2008, Cruz "did recklessly serious bodily injury to Cui, to wit: severe head trauma."

According to court records, a witness told police that he and Cui went to the U-Joy Nite Club where they each drank a bottle of beer on April 13. As they walked outside the club, the victim had an argument with two local men.

The witness tried to pacify them but, as he went to get his bicycle, he saw one of the two men hit the victim on the head with a helmet.

The suspect, later identified by investigators as Cruz, left the scene on board a motorcycle.

When police officers arrived at the scene, Cui was seen lying on the ground. Police said the victim's eyes were closed and he was swaying his head from left to right. According to a Tinian detective, when he interviewed Cui at the Commonwealth Health Center later that day, he and a translator could not understand what the victim was saying.

The detective said the victim was talking to himself and at the same time "doing odd sign languages." ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

4-hour power outage today

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. has scheduled a four-hour power outage today, Feb. 28, to conduct systems maintenance on entire grids covered by Feeders 4 and 7.

The outage from 6am to 10am will affect portions of Lower Base Sadog Tasi, Capital Hill, Kagman and portions of Papago (Botanical Garden), Lower Base industrial area, north of Tanapag, Achugao, San Roque, As Matuis, and Marpi.

CUC Power Division personnel will replace two rotten primary power poles in the San Roque area, replace one air brake system in Tanapag by the Mobil gas station, and clear primary lines of vegetation throughout Feeder 4 and 7.

Because of the danger involved to the linemen working on or near high voltage power lines, the electrical power supply to the feeder 4/7 circuit will require to be temporarily de-energized from 6-10am to ensure safety for the crews.

"This systems maintenance will coincide with the ongoing Pacific Training Program funded by the Department of the Interior. PLT training instructor Chris Middleton will observe the projects," said CUC in a statement issued yesterday.

"Although many areas of the existing electrical system is old, by performing this required maintenance to the electrical grid it will have an immediate impact in improving the distribution of power safely to the respective feeders. ***(CUC)***

Villagomez inks three proclamation events

In the jam-packed Governor's Conference Room yesterday morning, acting Gov. Timothy P. Villagomez signed three proclamations.

With the room full of children and adults, Villagomez proclaimed March as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month and Developmental Disability Awareness Month.

"Today, we recognize the prevalence and the dangers of traumatic brain injury in the United States and in our own Commonwealth. We highlight the importance of taking pro-active steps to avoid this type of injury, as well as helping those who have suffered this type of injury," Villagomez said. "I am also very pleased to recognize the work, value and service provided by the CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities. The DD Council constantly strives to be of service to those challenged by developmental disabilities, and I am proud to take this time to commend the council and recognize their important work for our community."

Every 21 seconds someone in the U.S. will sustain a traumatic brain injury, which comes out to more than 4,000 people daily.

Villagomez also signed a proclamation designating the week of March 2 to 6 as CNMI School Counseling Week.

"Our school counselors are responsible for guiding our school students toward success in school and life," he said. "School counselors do not merely help students, they develop our citizenry and contribute to our society's welfare. They help guide young people away from unproductive and harmful behavior and into productive pursuits and careers." ***(Kristi Eaton)***

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to Public Law 8-41, the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation (NMHC) Board of Directors, through its Vice Chairwoman of the Board, is hereby giving notice that a Regular Meeting of the Board will be held on Wednesday, March 04, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. at the NMHC Conference Room, Garapan, Saipan. The public is welcome to submit written or oral comments regarding the agenda below. Individuals interested in attending the meeting and needing special accommodations are requested to contact NMHC in advance.

I. PRELIMARY MATTERS
  a. Call to Order
  b. Roll Call
II. ADOPTION OF AGENDA
  a. October 16, 2008 Regular Board Meeting
  b. December 10, 2008 Special Board Meeting
  c. December 18, 2008 Special Board Meeting
III. MORTGAGE CREDIT PROGRAMS
  a. Request for appraisal companies to be included on our approved listing
  b. Request for contractors to be included on our approved listing
  c. Other Loan Matters
IV. CDBG
V. PROGRAM & HOUSING
  a. REAC
  b. Section 8 HCV Program
VI. FIELD OFFICE REPORT
VII. FISCAL AFFAIRS
  a. Budget FY 2010
  b. Financial Statement
  c. Loan Status Report
VIII. ADMIN & PROCUREMENT
  a. Rota Field Office Space
IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS
X. EXECUTIVE SESSION
XI. OTHER MATTERS
  a. American Recovery & Reinvestment Act
  b. Homeowner Affordability & Stability Plan
  c. Credit Tracker Presentation
  d. Collections
  e. Election of Officers
XII. ADJOURNMENT

(Note: Pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section 13(a) (7) and Section 13(c), the Board may vote to meet in executive session.)

/s/ MERCED M. TOMOKANE
Vice Chairwoman of the Board

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DOI's Salazar commits to protecting coral reefs

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, yesterday told task force members that the Obama Administration is committed to quick action on global warming—a key threat to coral reefs—and that the economic stimulus package, clean energy and community service programs and ethic of preserving natural treasures add up to good news for coral reef conservation.

"We will move ahead with a new energy frontier for the United States of America and for the world that will feature clean energy and address climate change," said Salazar. "Addressing climate change is a critical aspect of protecting coral reefs across the world and I know it will be high on the agenda of this task force," he told a meeting of officials at Interior Department headquarters.

Nancy Sutley, the new chair of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, also stressed the Administration's commitment to addressing global warming and promoting ocean conservation in general and protection of coral reefs in particular.

Interior manages 5 million acres of coral reefs. The department's ocean responsibilities also include 1.7 billion acres of the outer continental shelf; 177 island and coastal national wildlife refuges; 34 million acres in 74 coastal national parks; more than 35,000 miles of coastline; co-management with NOAA of the 89 million-acre Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument in Hawaii; and management, in part with NOAA, of the 70 million acres in the three new Pacific marine national monuments.

The Coral Reef Task Force was established in 1998 to lead U.S. efforts to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. It includes leaders of 12 federal agencies, seven U.S. states, territories, commonwealths, and three Freely Associated States.

The Secretary expressed support for the service of the task force, and extended particular appreciation to the governors of U.S. territories, which contain world-class coral reefs. Key participants in the meeting yesterday were CNMI Gov. Benigno R. Fitial American Samoa Gov. Togiola Tulafono; and Guam Gov. Felix Camacho.

Nik Pula, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Insular Affairs, co-chaired the meeting along with Mary Glacken, Acting NOAA Administrator. ***(DOI)***

MASSAGE

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vice costs at least $20.

Besides the exclusion of Chinese and Russian tourists from the Guam-CNMI visa waiver program, massage parlors in Garapan are also bracing for the March 1 deadline to comply with the requirements of the Saipan Zoning Law of 2008.

By Monday, the Zoning Office will start issuing fines of up to $1,000 per day to adult businesses that don't comply with the law. Some examples of the requirements for adult business building design are: screened openings so the public can't see inside; posting signs to prevent minors from entering; no outdoor loudspeakers; lighted walkways; and clean and neat exterior.

At least seven massage parlors in Garapan—Massage, Light Massage, Relax Massage, VIP Massage, Pure Spa, Palms Springs Spa, and Dolphin Salon—have banded together to comply with the zoning law, including enhancing their appearance and getting their masseuses certified or licensed in the CNMI.

Wan said the group, which he said consists of legitimate massage parlors, will create an examiner's board subcommittee to work on procedures for getting certified or licensed, which will include cross training.

"We are looking at one week to 10 days of short course for masseuses who will be given certificates of completion, then we will recommend to the Medical and Professional Licensing Board to recognize these masseuses and have them certified," he said.

Saipan Professional Massage Committee is also calling on other massage parlors and masseuses of different nationalities, including Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos, to contact Kin Wan at 287 6661 if they are interested in becoming members of the committee. Wan said the group is not limited to massage parlors in Garapan but also welcomes members from other villages.

Wan said once their masseuses are licensed by the government and comply with other requirements of the Saipan Zoning Law, they will be able to continue operating in the tourist district of Garapan beyond September.

These legitimate massage parlors are hoping that they won't be lumped with so called "adult businesses" which have to move out of Garapan in September. Wan said Pure Spa, for example, spent at least $200,000 to renovate its facility in Garapan to make it look better and cleaner, to comply with the zoning law.

"We don't want to move out of Garapan because we have invested lots of money to put up these businesses. We are legitimate massage parlors," he added.

Zoning administrator Steve Tilley was the one who proposed the idea of forming a group of legitimate massage parlors to work together to best comply with the requirements of the zoning law.

In related news, the Commonwealth Zoning Board is now looking for a new administrator.

Tilley yesterday said he will be leaving the Commonwealth Zoning Board because he and his wife will be relocating to the mainland in April.

"I have been very fortunate to have worked for the Commonwealth Zoning Board and to have had strong support from Governor Fitial and the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation. We have enjoyed Saipan and the many friends we have made here these last six years. However, we have family obligations and now must leave," he said.

LIST

From Page 1

signed into law this month, the CNMI is eligible for infrastructure funding in addition to individual tax credits residents will receive. But because the insular areas were unsuccessful in their attempt to allow the Interior Department to distribute their portion, the CNMI must apply and compete against other local governments for the competitive grant money. The CNMI will also receive a set amount of non-competitive formula grant money.

The central government, Public School System and Northern Marianas College have been working feverishly to apply for the competitive grant funding.

During the past week, the list increased from 53 projects totaling $270 million to 76 projects totaling $338 million. The list could continue to grow, said Commerce Secretary Michael Ada, who has been tasked with organizing the effort for funding.

Ada noted that many of the projects added last week are from the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.

Water projects were first dealt with and power projects have been added to the list. CUC is seeking $31.5 million for three power generators, each producing seven megawatts. The utility agency is also seeking $6 million in funding for two two-megawatt generators.

The biggest hurdle is the local vetting process, Ada said. Under the law, all competitive grant applications must go through one person, usually the governor. Each agency cannot simply submit its own application to the appropriate federal agency. That provision was buried within the several-hundred page law, so it was a good thing the law was read all the way through, Ada said.

The last thing the government wants to do is identify possible projects and not follow the proper procedures, he added.

The CNMI is moving along well with the application process, Ada said. By March 13, the infrastructure projects will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget.

Ada said a couple aspects of the Act disappoint government officials.

First, both American Samoa and Puerto Rico will receive increased funding for the Nutrition Assistance Program but the CNMI will not.

"NAP is really critical, especially on Rota and Tinian," Ada said.

Also, it was discovered that the CNMI Department of Public Health is the only U.S. jurisdiction not to have the section 330 designation, which impedes its chance to receive some federal grants.

The CNMI will continue to identify projects as long as money is available, Ada said.

For a listing of all projects, visit www. Commerce.gov.mp.

STIMULUS

From Page 1

while couples filing jointly earning $150,000 or less will receive an $800 credit.

For people who receive a paycheck and are subject to withholdings, the employer will usually handle the credit through automated withholding changes in early spring. The changes may result in an increase in take-home pay, according to the Internal Revenue Service.

But because the credit is refundable, those individuals who owe less tax that the credit will receive a check for the remaining balance.

For example, if an individual owes $300 in taxes, the tax credit will cover that amount and the individual will receive a check for the remaining balance of $100.

The amount of the credit must be reported on the employee's 2009 income tax return filed in 2010. Taxpayers who do not have taxes withheld by an employer during the year can also claim the credit on their 2009 tax return.

A one-time $250 payment will be made in 2009 to retirees, disabled individuals and Supplemental Security Income recipients receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration. Disabled veterans receiving benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will also receive the $250 payment.

Unlike last year's economic stimulus program, the IRS will not make the payment. Anyone who may qualify for the payment should contact the respective agency for more information, the IRS said.

The new law should generally not change 2008 tax returns, according to the IRS. It will largely impact 2009 returns filed in 2010.

However, for some small businesses provisions could affect 2008 tax returns. And for first-time homebuyers there is an expanded credit available on 2008 tax returns.

GROUP

From Page 1

filed against them in federal court on Thursday.

Taitano and King were charged with one count of conspiracy to utter counterfeit obligations and securities, and three counts of counterfeiting. Taitano and Manglona were charged with one count of conspiracy to utter counterfeit obligations and securities, and one count of counterfeiting.

The three were taken to the U.S. District Court for the NMI yesterday afternoon for a hearing. They pleaded not guilty.

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Alex R. Munson set no bail "at this time" for the three suspects.

Assistant U.S. Attorney James J. Benedetto stated in the indictment that the three used fake money on Jan. 12, 2009, to defraud at least four establishments: Koblerville Shell gas station, Tapo Fashion in Chalan Piao, Fashion Avenue in Chalan Kanoa, and Nang Ocha Store in San Vicente.

Benedetto said the object of the conspiracy was to obtain merchandise and genuine U.S. currency as change from the transactions.

The prosecutor said that on Jan. 12, 2009, Taitano supplied King with a counterfeit $50 bill to buy gasoline at the Koblerville Shell gas station. Benedetto said King used the fake $50 bill to pay for $10 gas.

Taitano allegedly supplied King with another counterfeit $50 bill to pay for clothing or other items at the Tapo Fashion. King passed the fake $50 bill to the sales clerk at the Tapo Fashion and obtained clothing and change, which she then gave to Taitano.

Benedetto said Taitano handed King another fake $50 bill to pay for clothing and other items at Fashion Avenue. King passed the counterfeit $50 bill to the sales clerk at the Fashion Avenue and obtained clothing and change. King then gave the money to Taitano.

Benedetto said Taitano also gave Manglona counterfeit $50 denominations.

Manglona allegedly passed one fake bill to the clerk of the Nang Ocha Store in San Vicente to pay for a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. Manglona received change, which he then gave to Taitano.

Police first discovered the passing of fake money on the island after brothers Taitano and Manglona had a fight at their compound in San Vicente last January.

Responding police officers arrested Manglona after he admitted purchasing a pack of cigarettes and a lighter at Nang Ocha Store using a fake $50 bill.

Manglona claimed that his brother has been dealing illegal drugs and has knowledge of stolen property around villages.

Manglona also disclosed that a few days ago his brother showed him a bunch of rolled up cash that were all counterfeit.

A police officer proceeded to Nang Ocha Store where he was able to confirm that there was indeed a fake $50 bill in the cash register.

U.S. Secret Service special agent Virgil D. "Gus" recently disclosed a significant increase in the amount of counterfeit U.S. currency bills being circulated on Saipan in the last 60 to 90 days.

Reichle, in an interview with Saipan Tribune, corroborated Crime Stoppers Program coordinator Jason Tarkong's statement that these fake dollar bills are now being made locally.

"We believe these fake bills are made here on Saipan. But as far as hard proof, we don't have it as of right now," Reichle had said.

Reichle and fellow special agent Mac Bostic recently conducted training for business and law enforcement representatives at the Chamber of Commerce in Garapan due to a recent rash of counterfeit complaints on the island.

Officer Tarkong first disclosed that the problem of fake bills on the island is getting serious, with people involved in illegal drugs believed to be behind the circulation of these fake bills.

Fitial wants DOI, insular chiefs to back 180-day wait

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

During a meeting with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and other federal and insular area leaders, Gov. Benigno Fitial delivered a statement seeking their support for the maximum 180-day delay in the implementation of the federalization law.

Under Public Law 116-229, federal immigration laws will extend to the CNMI on June 1, unless a delay is granted.

"We ask for your support for the extension of the effective date of the law that we are requesting," Fitial said to the four governors, four members of Congress, and about 20 representatives of separate federal agencies present at the Interagency Group on Insular Areas 2009 Plenary Session. "We need—and we think the Department [of Homeland Security] needs—the additional 180 days to ensure that the federal authorities are prepared to execute their new responsibilities when the law becomes effective."

According to a statement released from the Governor's Office, Salazar, in a general comment, said immigration laws must be applied in a way that reflects the different economic circumstances of the insular areas compared with the mainland.

Fitial, during brief remarks before officials and lawmakers in Washington D.C., noted that only one set of regulations—the Guam-CNMI visa waiver program—were released before Jan. 20.

"The new Administration has issued a directive that no further regulations should be promulgated until the newly appointed officials of the department have an opportunity to review and approve such regulations. Under these circumstances, there simply is not time before June 1 to establish the regulatory framework for implementing the new law," Fitial said.

Moreover, DHS has advised Congress that it would require $91 million in additional funding to establish the necessary facilities and the proper number of trained employees in the Commonwealth, the governor said.

"Even if the funding were available, the task cannot be completed by June 1 and, in my opinion, there really is some question whether that task can be completed even with the additional 180 days provided by the Act," he added.

The governor's third reason is what he said he hoped to bring to the other officials' attention—the 45 percent decline in the CNMI's tourism industry from its peak years in the late 1990s and the reduction in airplane seat capacity from Japan in the next few months.

On top of these issues, DHS has determined China and Russia must be left out of the visa waiver program because of national security concerns, the governor said.

Fitial also spoke met with DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano at a White House dinner Sunday evening and discussed the pending request with her briefly, according to the statement.

'Contributions cannot be overstated'

Rep. Ralph DLG Torres is also asking Napolitano for a delay. The representative submitted comments on the Federal Register Web site seeking a delay, as well as voicing his displeasure with the exclusion of the China and Russia markets in the proposed visa waiver program.

"The contribution that these two countries provide cannot be overstated given the current economic crisis here in the CNMI. Such a disruption in the tourism market will substantially affect the economy and the people of the CNMI," he wrote.

Torres said different criteria in determining national security should be used for the CNMI compared to the U.S. mainland and Guam, because the Commonwealth has a unique historical tourism relationship with the two countries.

Tudela lauds funding under stimulus law

Saipan Mayor Juan B. Tudela is urging all concerned government agencies in the Commonwealth to immediately take advantage of the funding provided under the stimulus law, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

He said the U.S. Conference of Mayors worked hard to make sure that the stimulus bill would contain funding to benefit member cities and territories.

Tudela was in Washington D.C. during the U.S. presidential inauguration week to attend the Winter Meeting of the U.S. Conference, and participated during the deliberations. It was that same when the U.S. Conference of Mayors approved the final agreement in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Tudela

The agreement provides the mayors with an opportunity to create jobs, invest in sustainable infrastructure, and increase energy efficiency while reducing climate emissions.

The approved congressional appropriations include:

■ The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant in the amount of 2.8 billion. This is a huge victory for a program conceived and championed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. In addition, there is another $400 million in competitive energy grants to be administered by the U.S. Department of Energy;

■ The Highway Program at $27.6 billion, with 30 percent to be sub-allocated to local areas through the Surface Transportation Program;

■ The Airport Improvements Grants at 1.1 billion;

■ The Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Programs at $1 billion;

■ The Public Housing Capital Funds (Modernization) at $4 billion;

■ For Public Housing Capital at $4 billion;

■ For Emergency Shelter Grants at 1.5 billion;

■ The Safe Drinking Water Revolving Funds at $2 billion;

■ The Community Oriented Policing Services at $1 billion, which waived the $75,000 cap and the $75,000 matching requirements;

■ The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant,a block grant for Public Safety, at $2 million, which has more than doubles the funding ever provided in one year;

■ For the Workforce Training Program at $3.95 billion, with $1.2 billion for youth training, including summer jobs. Restoration of the summer jobs program has been a key priority for the USCM since the standalone program was eliminated in the passage of the Workforce Investment Act in 1998;

■ For schools' modernization at $8.8 billion. This funding includes the $39.54 billion available in state general fiscal relief for schools and each governor of states will have discretion on how the funding will be sub-allocated;

■ The National Endowment for the Arts will receive $50 million to provide grants to state and local arts agencies to assist non-profit agencies create or retain jobs in the arts community.

"Without the strong leadership of Conference president Manny Diaz of Miami, Florida, and the hard work of all the mayors, all of these funding would not have been possible, and the mayors will not be victorious in obtaining direct funding for their cities and local governments in the largest funding bill in American history," said Tudela.

Tudela said he looks forward to seeing the local government maximize every opportunity to apply for these grant monies, where almost all of these programs have been implemented all year round here in the CNMI. ***(PR)***

BIRTHDAY GIRL
Happy 5th birthday to Vinalynn Arisa Oronig, who celebrated her birthday yesterday, Feb.27. Greetings come from your mommy.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

IGIA MEETING
Island leaders listen as NMI Delegate Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan calls for action on visas for immediate relatives during this week's meeting of the Interagency Group on Insular Affairs. The purpose of the IGIA is to ensure that federal agencies cooperate in their response to island issues. Present at the meeting at the Interior Department in Washington were, from left, Delegate Sablan, Virgin Islands Delegate Donna Christensen, Guam Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo, American Samoa Delegate Eni F.V. Faleomavaega, and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. CNMI Gov. Benigno Fitial, American Samoa Gov. Togiola Tulafono, Virgin Islands Gov. John de Jongh, and Guam Gov. Felix Camacho also attended.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

RECRUITMENT FOR ZONING ADMINISTRATOR

The Commonwealth Zoning Board is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Zoning Administrator. This is a full-time position on Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Zoning Administrator manages the Zoning Office which is responsible for processing permit inquiries and applications, maintaining record and data systems, inspecting and enforcing compliance, interpreting the Saipan Zoning Law, educating the public, staffing the Zoning Board, coordinating with other agencies, preparing updates to the Saipan Zoning Law and Board Regulations, preparing budgets and tracking expenditures, and preparing reports and grant applications (see Section 310 of the Saipan Zoning Law at www.zoning.gov.mp).

The Saipan Zoning Law of 2007 became effective on February 1, 2008. Since then, the Zoning Office has processed almost 3,000 inquiries and zoning permits. There is strong political and public support for the zoning program and a high level of voluntary compliance. The Zoning Board is committed to professionally administering the Law; maintaining close contact with elected officials, the public, other agencies and the business community; and adapting the Law to changing circumstances.

The minimum requirements for the position are a baccalaureate degree, but preferably a graduate degree, in planning or a related field, and five years of progressive experience in land use planning, comprehensive planning, or land use administration (CNMI Zoning Code § 7222). The maximum salary is $50,000. Health and retirement benefits are provided. Information about the Zoning Board and the Zoning Office may be viewed at the Zoning Board website: www.zoning.gov.mp.

Application submittals should be addressed to Steve Tilley, Zoning Administrator, and must be received at the Zoning Office by March 27, 2009. Submittals may be sent via e-mail, FAX, US mail or hand delivered to the address below. Submittals must include a letter of interest, a CNMI Application for Employment, and a resume. The Application for Employment may be downloaded from the publications page of the Zoning Board website. Applicants must be US citizens, permanent residents or IRs.

Send submittals to: E-mail: staff@zoning.gov.mp. FAX: 670-234-9666. US Mail: Caller Box 10007, Saipan, MP 96950 USA. Hand Delivery: Zoning Office, 2nd Floor, Joeten Building, DanDan, Saipan

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***MAYA B. KARA** is a former CNMI Acting Attorney General, Chief Legislative Counsel, Governor's and Lt. Governor's Legal Counsel and DOL Hearing Officer*

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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EDITORIAL

Obama's bottom line

There have been few, if any, dull moments in the first five weeks of Barack Obama's presidency, at least when it comes to the economy. His first major proposal—an economic stimulus package larger than any previous legislation of its kind—caused a partisan brawl on Capitol Hill. His Treasury secretary triggered a sell-off on Wall Street when he announced a vague plan to ease the credit crunch by relieving banks of some illiquid assets. Other initiatives arrived weekly, including efforts to slow the pace of foreclosures, strengthen banks' balance sheets and, most recently, provide a new regulatory structure for the financial industry. All the while, reports on joblessness, the housing market and other economic indicators have been almost universally gloomy, sometimes frighteningly so.

On Tuesday night, Obama offered some thematic unity to the flurry of rescues and handouts. In a speech aimed more at the audience watching from home than the one inside the Capitol, he offered a solid rationale for the stimulus spending and tax cuts, the financial industry salvage projects and the aid to struggling borrowers. With resentment rising about the efforts to help borrowers and lenders who made bad bets on the housing market—an anger personified by CNBC's Rick Santelli—the burden was on Obama to remind the public that the housing problems are connected to the credit crunch, which feeds into and is fed by the problems in the larger economy. He did that, although his remarks provided a better defense for bailing out Wall Street companies than troubled homeowners.

But a good rationale, by itself, isn't enough to instill the business and consumer confidence needed to cut short the recession. The administration and Congress also must act in a way that's consistent with Obama's powerful rhetoric. Already, the White House and House Democrats appear to be following different scripts; the same day Obama held a "fiscal responsibility summit" to explore ways to trim the deficit, the House Appropriations Committee unveiled a spending bill for the remaining seven months of the fiscal year that gave domestic programs 8 percent more, on average, than in the previous year. The implication is that lawmakers will use the recession as an excuse to treat every spending bill as a stimulus package, no matter what the White House says about sacrificing "worthy priorities for which there are no dollars."

In addition, most of the president's initiatives have been long on theory, short on detail. That's one reason the stock market plunged after Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner announced plans for modifying the Troubled Asset Relief Program—Geithner provided an outline, but investors were hungry for enough specifics to judge the plan's potential effectiveness. We understand the administration's desire to show that it's working on all the interlocking pieces of the economic downturn, but there are only so many times officials can say "Stay tuned!" before they lose credibility. At least there should be plenty of details in the budget the administration releases Thursday. We'll see how well Obama's team sticks to the mission he laid out Tuesday.

(c) 2009, Los Angeles Times

Mom, Guantanamo and not getting the joke

By ROSA BROOKS
Special to the Los Angeles Times

Brooks is a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center. E-mail her at rbrooks@latimescolumnists.com.

My mother is a terrorist!

Or at least that's what certain unidentified U.S. interrogators seem to suspect.

It all stems from a satirical article called "How to Build Your Own Home H-Bomb" that my mother, Barbara Ehrenreich, wrote with two co-authors 30 years ago. The article, published in *Seven Days* magazine, was chock-full of helpful tips for would-be nuclear bomb makers. For instance, it advised those struggling to enrich uranium to make "a simple home centrifuge. Fill a standard-size bucket one-quarter full of liquid uranium hexafluoride. Attach a six-foot rope to the bucket handle. Now swing the (bucket) around your head as fast as possible. Keep this up for about 45 minutes."

It's a good thing the Iranians haven't discovered this technique. But don't chuckle. If you're reading this, and you ever admit it (and believe me, if tortured, you'll admit anything), you never know what might happen.

Just ask Binyam Mohamed, who was released from Guantanamo to his home in Britain this week after nearly seven years of detention. His lawyers believe that he was suspected of being a terrorist, in part, because he confessed to having read my mother's article.

Mohamed, an Ethiopian refugee, moved to Britain with his father in 1994. In June 2001, Mohamed—then 22—traveled to Afghanistan. When the war began there in October 2001, he fled to Pakistan. In April 2002, he tried to fly back to Britain, but his papers weren't in order and he was detained by Pakistani authorities.

According to his lawyers, he was then subjected to brutal interrogation by Pakistani and U.S. agents, who seemed convinced that he was a top al-Qaida figure in possession of nuclear secrets. They say he was beaten and threatened with death, then "rendered"—apparently with CIA cooperation—in July 2002 to Morocco, where interrogators repeatedly slashed his genitals with a scalpel.

At some point, they say, Mohamed began to confess to an impressive range of sins. Pressed for details about his purported nuclear know-how, for instance, Mohamed admitted that he had, indeed, once read my mother's article on the Web but said it was just a spoof.

They didn't get the joke. According to Mohamed's attorneys, who have had access to classified records, the article seems to have been deemed a crucial piece of "evidence" against their client. An intelligence-community game of Telephone ensued, in which Mohamed's "confession" that he had read up on the manufacture of nuclear weapons was passed along from interrogator to interrogator, until U.S. authorities convinced themselves that Mohamed was part of a dangerous nuclear plot against the United States.

Mohamed, whose mental health was rapidly deteriorating, was transferred to Guantanamo and charged with conspiracy to aid al-Qaida. He asserted that he was not guilty and had confessed only as a result of torture. But when his defense attorneys sought access to the records they believed would exonerate him, the U.S. government refused to turn them over. By 2007, the attorneys said, Mohamed had become so unstable that he was smearing his feces on his cell wall.

Eventually, the military lawyer assigned to prosecute Mohamed resigned to protest his own office's withholding of crucial evidence, and in the end, all charges were dropped. This week, Mohamed was finally released from Guantanamo and allowed to return home to Britain a free man.

Still, many details of Mohamed's case remain secret. The Bush administration agreed to release Mohamed to British authorities only on the condition that details relating to his interrogation remain classified. Mohamed's attorneys went to court over the issue, and on Feb. 4, the British High Court of Justice reluctantly agreed to the continued suppression of details about Mohamed's interrogation. But the court openly expressed its dismay that "a democracy governed by the rule of law (the U.S.) would expect a court in another democracy (Britain) to suppress ... evidence contained in reports by its own officials ... where the evidence was relevant to allegations of torture, ... politically embarrassing though it might be."

It's definitely embarrassing to be known as a nation that tortured detainees, and for the U.S. officials who authorized Mohamed's torture, the consequences, if made public, could be worse than just embarrassing. By now, though, U.S. officials are fairly used to this form of political embarrassment. My guess is that records of Mohamed's interrogation would show something else that's just as embarrassing for the U.S.: the inability of many of our ace intelligence experts to tell the difference between threats posed by serious terrorist masterminds and the threat posed by a hapless young man who once read a satirical article about how to make nuclear weapons.

I hope they'll let me visit my mom in her interrogation cell.

EDITORIAL POLICY The *Saipan Tribune* welcomes comments on any article, column, editorial, or topic that may be of interest to the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, Century Insurance Building, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Feeling lonely is a real pain

By GREGORY RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Are you feeling lonely, disconnected or alienated? It could be making you sick and, ironically, you're not alone.

In 1985, when researchers asked a cross-section of Americans how many confidants they had, the most common response was three. When they asked again in 2004, the most common answer—from 25 percent of respondents—was zero, nil, nada.

In 1950, only 9.3 percent of American households consisted of people living alone. By 2000, that percentage had jumped to 26 percent.

Living alone doesn't necessarily make you lonely. But it certainly doesn't help. Individuals have varying levels of need for connection with others. But when your needs and your situation don't match up, you might feel a little pang in your gut to go along with that unpleasant impression that you're floating alone on a raft in the middle of the ocean. A pain. Literally.

And that's a good thing, says University of Chicago neuroscientist John Cacioppo, who recently co-wrote a book called "Loneliness."

In the same way that physical pain helps protect you from physical danger, says Cacioppo, social pain evolved to help keep individuals from the dangers of social isolation. Just as the discomfort of scalded skin tells your brain to pull your hand away from boiling water, loneliness developed as a stimulus to get humans to pay more attention to the people around them and to reach out and touch someone.

There's been a lot of talk in recent years about Americans losing their sense of social connectedness. But when we speak of the loss of civic engagement, we generally talk of its costs to our democracy and civil society. What Cacioppo is arguing is that social isolation, and the feelings of loneliness it can cause, not only hurt society at large but carry physical dangers for individuals. As the ranks of the chronically lonely grow, it threatens to become a public health problem.

Physical aloneness is already a known problem. It can be as bad for your health as smoking or obesity. Isolation can lead to risky behavior, and the absence of friends, colleagues, neighbors, family or caregivers can have serious consequences, particularly for aging people. In addition to the dangerous consequences of being alone, the bad feelings engendered by loneliness also can have detrimental effects on the body and therefore hasten the aging process.

Here's how it works: The empty feeling of loneliness is an alarm signal embedded in our genes that tells us when to reach out to others. It gives us a heightened sense of wariness and threat, and it elicits a chain of physiological reactions that we know as the fight-or-flight response. Fight-or-flight creates increased resistance in our cardiovascular system and floods our bodies with hormones that pump us up. Long ago, these hormones helped our ancestors run from danger or fight it off. Today, however, in the absence of imminent attack by a saber-toothed tiger, these chemicals can be a corrosive force to the body.

In contemporary society, the fight-or-flight response may not be over quickly, the way an ancient physical threat would have been. We can suffer the same debilitating feelings of loneliness (or other kinds of high and constant stress) week after week, year after year, wearing down the body's metabolism and muscular efficiency.

All of this means we need to take the problem of lagging civic engagement and growing social isolation out of the realm of the social sciences and put it in the physical sciences. We have to stop looking at declining civic participation as a primarily political problem that is solvable through increased activism. Although activism may increase participation, which in turn translates into less social isolation, it does not get to the deeper problem of the quality of connections we form with the people who surround us on a day-to-day basis.

As Cacioppo puts it, "If civic engagement is to contribute substantially to assuaging the problem of loneliness, then it cannot be something merely akin to networking at a trade show."

Nature gave us a warning system that reminds us of the dangers of being isolated from other humans. Millions of alarm bells are ringing.

Rodriguez is director of the California Fellows Program at the New America Foundation and author of Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America*. E-mail him at grodriguez@latimescolumnists.com.*

Rallying support by staying on point

By DOYLE MCMANUS
(C) 2009, LOS ANGELES TIMES

Speechmaking always has been good for Barack Obama.

In 2004, as a 42-year-old state legislator, he vaulted to national stature with a brilliant speech to the Democratic National Convention in Boston.

In 2007, he won the hearts of Iowa Democrats with a rip-roaring Jefferson-Jackson Day talk.

In 2008, after losing the New Hampshire primary, he rallied his flagging presidential campaign with one of the greatest concession statements ever made.

And he saved his candidacy later that spring with his Philadelphia address on race relations.

This is a man who knows the power of oratory. And it's a good thing he does: We needed some.

The new president had three goals in his first address to both houses of Congress on Tuesday night.

He needed to spell out and defend his plan for stimulating the economy, which his administration sometimes has stumbled in explaining. He wanted to rally support for the rest of his ambitious domestic program, including expensive investments in health care, energy and education. And he sought to lift the mood of the nation by promising that better times lie ahead.

The least concrete of those goals, lifting the nation's mood, was actually the most important—because it will be difficult for Obama to implement any of his plans if Americans lose hope.

That's why the first lines from the speech that the White House released in advance Tuesday were these: "While our economy may be weakened and our confidence shaken, though we are living through difficult and uncertain times, tonight I want every American to know this: We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before."

The obvious comparison is to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who rallied Americans during the Great Depression with his fireside chats, broadcast on the still-new medium of radio.

"There is an element in the readjustment of our financial system more important than currency, more important than gold, and that is the confidence of the people," Roosevelt said in his first radio speech to the nation in 1933.

But FDR enjoyed a massive, obedient majority in Congress that passed his banking bill in a single day with a minimum of dissent. (As Will Rogers quipped at the time, "Congress doesn't pass legislation any more. They just wave at the bills as they go by.")

With that kind of support, Roosevelt had an easier job and could aim his speech mostly at persuading citizens to be patient and avoid the urge to withdraw their money from the banks.

Obama, in contrast, is asking the public for help in putting pressure on his opponents in Congress.

That's why the best analogy may not be to Roosevelt but to Ronald Reagan, who turned his presidency into a permanent campaign to rally public support to his side, even when Congress was skeptical.

On Thursday, Obama will deliver his first budget, and his proposals for health care, energy and education will require spending above and beyond the $787-billion stimulus bill. He said in his speech that he is likely to seek more funds to bail out the nation's banks.

"I know how unpopular it is to be seen as helping banks right now," Obama said. "I get it." But, he added, "we cannot afford to govern out of anger. ... our job is to solve the problem."

In effect, Obama was appealing to his majority, the roughly 60 percent of voters who support him, to back him in his coming battles with Congress—even when he asks for more money for the banks.

He'll need the help. In the stimulus battle, Republicans once again cast themselves as the anti-spending party, and they show no sign of abandoning that stance. They already have served notice that they plan to fight Obama's health-care proposals just as they fought Bill Clinton's in 1993.

As Reagan did before him, Obama understands the importance of dramatizing his message in a television-friendly way. He has taken his ideas on the road, visiting a highway construction site in Virginia, a Caterpillar factory in Illinois and a high school gymnasium in Arizona.

And in case there was anyone who still hadn't gotten the point, he capped off his road show with a four-hour "fiscal summit" in the White House.

There was no "news" in Tuesday night's speech; it was essentially an hour-long elaboration of the themes Obama introduced in his campaign and returned to in his inaugural address.

But consistency can be a virtue, especially during uncertain times. And as both candidate and president, Obama has delivered a clear and consistent message.

Any president whose speeches summon comparisons to Roosevelt and Reagan isn't doing too badly.

McManus is a Times columnist. He can be reached at doyle.mcmanus@latimes.com.

Facing life with Facebook

Don't Get Me Started

By KEVIN COWHERD
(C) 2009, THE BALTIMORE SUN

Not long ago, looking for ways to waste even more time on the Internet, I joined Facebook.

Facebook, of course, is the popular social networking site where people go to connect with one another, which seemed problematic at first because I didn't really want to connect with anyone, and I didn't really want anyone to connect with me.

But I joined anyway, mainly to torture my three kids, who were mortified at the prospect of their middle-aged dad cavorting in the online playground of the young.

As of this writing, I have 28 Facebook "friends," two or three of whom I actually know, and the number is growing rapidly.

This is because I have no standards when it comes to friending.

I'm a big-tent guy and my policy is: "Hey, you want to be my friend? Sure! C'mere and give me a big Facebook hug!"

This kind of promiscuous friending could lead to problems down the road, I suppose.

I don't know who monitors Facebook. But I bet if you comb through my friends list, you might find people like the Unabomber and Rod Blagojevich and maybe even A-Rod's cousin, the one who gave him the steroids.

Actually, it doesn't really matter who my friends are, since I have no plans to communicate with most of them anyway.

(Note to the FBI: If the Unabomber is on my friends list, how's he getting on Facebook from a prison cell anyway? Might be time for another contraband sweep of that cell block.)

Some people have hundreds and even thousands of Facebook friends, which is really amazing. You must have to practically live on the site to put up those kinds of numbers.

One of my kids, the 17-year-old, has 597 friends. I asked him about this.

"What can I say? I'm a popular guy," he said.

He figures he actually knows about 30 of those people, meaning he has about 577 anonymous strangers as friends, which happens only on Facebook.

On the other hand, my friend Lori has only 294 friends and she still describes herself as a "friends whore," meaning she's easy when it comes to friending, too.

But, look, the way I'm going, I could be up to 294 friends by breakfast tomorrow. So I won't be ridiculing anyone for serial friending, that's for sure.

Getting back to the issue of wasting time, boy, you can really do that on Facebook.

One of the best ways to waste time is by issuing "status updates" that let your friends know what you're doing at that moment.

I can tell you, with some degree of certainty, that you'll never, ever read anything as boring as your average Facebook status update.

Here are some actual ones I've received, with last names deleted:

"Bill is wandering around the mall, waiting for his car to be done at Sears."

"Jo really wanted a slab of cake, but is chewing some Doublemint. It's inadequate."

"E hates when people snore on the train. She's tired, too. But she doesn't snore on the train."

And my absolute favorite:

"W was doing dishes and cut her hand on a broken glass and didn't notice until things turned a little bit too red."

Sure, what's the first thing you do when you slice open your hand?

Run to the computer, smear blood all over the keyboard, and tell all your Facebook friends!

I wonder if people with gunshot wounds will now stagger over to the computer and post a status update before calling 911?

It took me about a week to get up the nerve to post a status update of my own.

Oh, I had plenty of mundane things to post. Look, you already know I have no life, by virtue of the fact that I joined Facebook.

So you weren't going to get "Kevin is traversing the Arctic Circle by dog sled" or "Kevin is fending off a berserk chimpanzee."

Finally I came up with this: "Kevin is looking for a column."

But that seemed too racy.

So my next status update read: "Kevin is enjoying a small garden salad for lunch. Ken's Raspberry Vinaigrette dressing, if you care."

Facebook has something like 175 million users. And I imagine that in the entire five-year history of the site, that was the single lamest status update of all time.

Oh, look at that!

I just logged onto Facebook and I'm up to 32 friends.

I'd throw a party, if I only knew who most of them were.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Partly cloudy and breezy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy and breezy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲86° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲88° ▼77°	▲88° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°

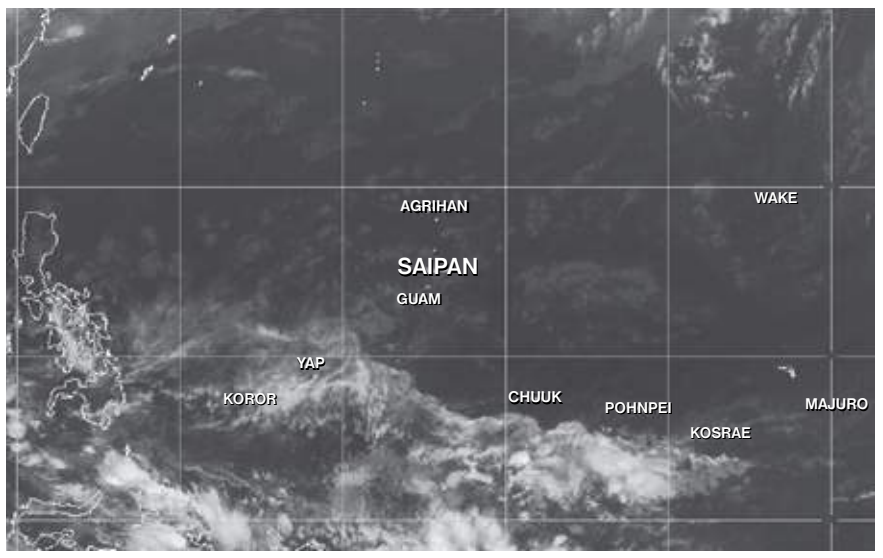
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Sunny	▲85	▼74
Palau	Showers	▲86	▼77
Yap	Cloudy	▲88	▼76
Chuuk	Sunny	▲88	▼79
Pohnpei	Mostly Sunny	▲85	▼74
Kosrae	Rain	▲88	▼77
Majuro	Rain	▲82	▼78

Around The Globe

Auckland	Rain	▲76	▼66
Beijing	Mostly Sunny	▲46	▼29
Hong Kong	Showers	▲73	▼67
Honolulu	Mostly Cloudy	▲72	▼67
London	Mostly Sunny	▲52	▼43
Los Angeles	Cloudy	▲72	▼54
Manila	Thundershowers	▲92	▼74
Melbourne	Mostly Sunny	▲77	▼56
Miami	Mostly Sunny	▲81	▼65
New York	Partly Sunny	▲44	▼32
Osaka	Cloudy	▲50	▼41
Paris	Partly Sunny	▲52	▼45
Pusan	Mostly Cloudy	▲54	▼39
Rome	Mostly Sunny	▲57	▼40
Salem	Rain	▲49	▼40
San Francisco	Rain	▲63	▼53
Seoul	Cloudy	▲50	▼30
Tokyo	Rain	▲52	▼36
Washington, DC	Showers	▲43	▼31

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00AM, FRIDAY, FEB. 27, 2009
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Trade-wind convergence is causing scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms over a large area near the equator from southwest of Chuuk to south of Pohnpei to over Kosrae. This area is within 135 miles of a line from EQ141E to 3N145E to 4N163E. A mid to upper-level trough reaches northeastward from EQ160E to 10N170E then turns northward through a mid to upper low centered east of Wake Island at 19N173E to beyond 25N at 173E. Upper-level divergence associated with this trough is enhancing scattered shower activity from southeast of Kosrae to over Majuro within 120 miles of a line from 3N164E to 7N174E. Scattered showers and a few thunderstorms are occurring near the upper low between 15N and 21N from 172E to 176E. A low-level trough extends northward from 9N173E to 20N175E then turns northeastward to beyond 25N at 179E. Cloudiness and scattered showers are found near the trough axis east of a line from 8N174E to 16N177E to 25N177E.

Tides

Saipan Harbor		
3:36 AM Today	Low Tide:	0.4 Feet
9:35 AM Today	High Tide:	1.9 Feet
4:09 PM Today	Low Tide:	0.3 Feet
10:08 PM Today	High Tide:	1.8 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:35 AM	6:24 PM
Sunday	6:34 AM	6:25 PM
Monday	6:34 AM	6:25 PM
Tuesday	6:33 AM	6:25 PM
Wednesday	6:32 AM	6:25 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	8:18 AM	9:06 PM
Sunday	8:59 AM	10:02 PM
Monday	9:44 AM	11:01 PM
Tuesday	10:34 AM	
Wednesday	11:30 AM	12:02 AM

GET YOUR PICTURES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED—FOR FREE

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- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

REQUIREMENTS

For pictures:

- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and a phone number.
- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

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- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2009

DEPARTURES

Saipan-Rota			
CO9597	11:50am	12:25pm	1,7
Saipan-Guam			
CO9317	5:00am	5:50am	Daily
CO9313	8:30am	9:20am	Daily
CO9597	11:50am	1:20pm	1,7 via Rota
CO9601	12:30pm	1:20pm	2,3,4,5,6
CO9603	3:30pm	4:20pm	Daily
CO9605	6:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
CO9599	9:30pm	10:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Narita			
NW 099	5:00am	7:35am	Daily
NW 078	8:20am	1:30pm	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 075	4:55pm	7:30pm	Daily
Guam-Narita			
NW 73	4:10pm	7:00pm	Daily
NW 81	3:55pm	6:55pm	Daily
Saipan-Osaka			
OZ 119	4:00am	6:40am	1,4,6
NW 083	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Guam-Osaka			
NW 79	4:45pm	7:35pm	Daily
Saipan-Nagoya			
NW 078	8:20am	11:05am	Daily
Guam-Nagoya			
NW 23	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Incheon			
OZ 604	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ 604	2:40am	6:30am	2,3,4,5,6,7
OZ 119	4:00am	11:25am	1,4,6 via Osaka
OZ 606	3:20pm	7:00pm	Daily
Saipan-Busan			
OZ 608	3:20am	6:50am	1,4,5,7
Saipan-Shanghai			
FM 844	2:50am	5:40am	2,6
Rota-Guam			
CO 9597	12:50pm	1:20pm	1,7
Guam-Palau			
CO 953	7:40pm	8:40pm	1,7
CO 893	5:50pm	6:50pm	3,5
Palau-Manila			
CO 893	7:35pm	9:10pm	3,5
Guam-Manila			
CO 893	5:50pm	9:10pm	3,5 via Koror
CO 933	8:00pm	9:40pm	Daily
PR 111	6:00am	7:50am	1,2,4,6,7
Nagoya-Manila			
NW 71	8:40pm	11:55pm	Daily
Incheon-Hongkong			
OZ 721	9:20am	12:00pm	Daily
OZ 723	7:45pm	10:35pm	Daily
OZ 7173	8:00pm	10:50pm	5,7
Narita-Manila			
NW 1	7:00pm	10:55pm	Daily

ARRIVALS

Rota-Saipan			
CO 9598	3:25am	4:00am	5,6
Guam-Saipan			
CO 9316	2:30am	3:20am	1,2,3,4,7
CO9598	2:30am	4:00am	5,6 via Rota
CO9596	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
CO9600	10:20am	11:10am	Daily
CO9602	2:00pm	2:50pm	Daily
CO9604	5:00pm	5:50pm	Daily
CO9606	8:00pm	8:50pm	Daily
Narita-Saipan			
NW 076	10:15am	2:40pm	Daily
NW 077	6:25pm	1:20am+1	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 100	8:45pm	1:10am+1	Daily
Narita-Guam			
NW 74	9:45am	2:20pm	Daily
NW 82	10:30am	3:10pm	Daily
Osaka-Saipan			
OZ 120	9:50pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7
NW 084	10:40am	3:05pm	Daily
Osaka-Guam			
NW 80	10:30am	3:00pm	Daily
Nagoya-Saipan			
NW 077	9:00pm	1:20am+1	Daily
Nagoya-Guam			
NW 24	10:00am	2:30pm	Daily
Incheon-Saipan			
OZ 605	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ 603	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ 120	7:10pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7 via Osaka
OZ 603	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1,2,3,4,5,6
Busan-Saipan			
OZ 607	9:00pm	2:10am+1	3,4,6,7
Shanghai-Saipan			
FM 843	7:15pm	1:50am+1	1,5
Guam-Rota			
CO 9598	2:30am	3:00am	5,6
Palau-Guam			
CO 954	2:30am	5:25am	1,2
CO 892	2:35am	5:30am	4,6
Manila-Palau			
CO 892	10:10pm	1:50am+1	3,5
Manila-Guam			
CO 892	10:10pm	5:30am+1	3,5 via Koror
CO 934	11:10pm	4:40am+1	Daily
PR 110	10:10pm	4:00am+1	1,3,5,6,7
Manila-Nagoya			
NW 72	6:30am	11:05am	Daily
Hongkong-Incheon			
OZ 724	12:30am	4:50am	Daily
OZ 7183	12:45am	5:05am	1,4,6
OZ 722	1:30pm	5:45pm	Daily
Manila-Narita			
NW 2	7:45am	12:40pm	Daily

Editor's Note: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); CO: Continental; FM: Shanghai Airlines; PR: Philippine Airlines; NW: Northwest; OZ: Asiana
ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam-Rota			
FRE 100	7:00am	7:30am	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 100	7:50am	8:20am	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 200	9:00am	9:30am	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 200	9:50am	10:15am	Daily
Guam-Rota			
FRE 300	4:00pm	4:30pm	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 300	4:50pm	5:25pm	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 400	6:00pm	6:30pm	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 400	6:45pm	7:15pm	Daily
Saipan-Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45am	6:55am	Daily
FRE 103	7:30am	7:40am	Daily
FRE 105	8:00am	8:10am	Daily
FRE 107	8:40am	8:50am	Daily
FRE 109*	9:10am	9:20am	Daily
FRE 111*	10:45am	10:55am	Daily

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
FRE 113	11:40am	11:50am	Daily
FRE 115	1:00pm	1:10pm	Daily
FRE 117	2:30pm	2:40pm	Daily
FRE 119	4:00pm	4:10pm	Daily
FRE 121	4:40pm	4:50pm	Daily
FRE 123 *	5:40pm	5:50pm	Daily
FRE 125 *	6:00pm	6:10pm	Daily
Tinian-Saipan w/ connecting flights to Rota or Guam**			
FRE 102	7:05am	7:15am	Daily
FRE 104	7:50am	8:00am	Daily
FRE 106**	8:20am	8:30am	Daily
FRE 108**	9:00am	9:10am	Daily
FRE 110	10:00am	10:10am	Daily
FRE 112	11:05am	11:15am	Daily
FRE 114	12:00pm	12:10pm	Daily
FRE 116	1:30pm	1:40pm	Daily
FRE 118	2:50pm	3:00pm	Daily
FRE 120**	4:20pm	4:30pm	Daily
FRE 122**	5:00pm	5:10pm	Daily
FRE 124	6:05pm	6:15pm	Daily
FRE 126	6:20pm	6:30pm	Daily

Schedule of Religious Services

CATHOLIC

Mt. Carmel Cathedral
Sunday Mass: 6am, 9am, 11am and 6pm
Monday-Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6am and 6pm

Korean Center
Sunday: 10:30am
Wednesday: 10am
Thursday-Friday: 8pm
Saturday: 3pm and 7:30pm

Kristo Rai Parish
Sunday Mass: 6am, 8am and 9:30am
Monday- Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6am and 6pm
Saturday: 6am and 6pm

Nuestra Senora De Soledad Parish
Wednesday Mass: 6pm
First Friday Healing Mass: 6pm
Saturday Mass: 6pm
Sunday Masses: 7:30am & 9am

Saint Jude Parish
Sunday: 6am, 8am, 10am
Wednesday and Thursday: 6pm

San Antonio Parish
Sunday: 6am and 8am
Tuesday and Friday: 6pm

San Francisco de Borja-Rota
Sunday: 6am and 8am
Monday-Saturday: 6am
Wednesday: 6pm

San Isidro-Rota
Sunday: 5am and 10am
Monday-Wednesday: 7pm
Thursday-Saturday: 5am and 7pm

San Jose (Oleai) Parish
Sunday: 6am and 7:30am
Tuesday-Wednesday and Friday-Saturday: 6pm

San Roque Parish
Sunday: 9am
Wednesday: 6pm
Saturday: 10:30am

San Vicente Parish
Sunday: 6am, 9am and 6pm
Monday-Saturday: 6pm

Santa Remedios
Sunday: 7:30am
Tuesday: 6pm
Saturday: 10am-Baptism

Santa Soledad
Sunday: 7:30am

PROTESTANT

Born Again Christian (Upper Room Int'l Ministries), Saipan
Wednesday Prayer and Healing Night: 8-10:30pm
Saturday Tagalog Service: 8-10:30pm
Sunday English Service: 9:30-11am
Sunday School for Children: 10-11am
Sunday Filipino Service: 7-9pm

Calvary Baptist Church, Saipan
Sunday School: 9am
Sunday Morning Worship: 10am
Sunday Evening Worship: 6pm
Wednesday Prayer Service: 7pm

Chinese Christian Church of Saipan
Worship Services: Sunday, 10am and 7:30pm
Bible Study: Tuesday-Friday, 9:25pm

Cornerstone Christian Church, Saipan
Worship/Study Opportunities
Adult Sunday School: 9am
Youth Sunday School: 9am
English Worship Service Sunday: 10am
Sunday Service: 5:30pm
Worship/Fellowship Sunday: 9:30pm
Evangelism/Follow-up: Sunday/Monday: 1:30/7:30pm
Worship Team: Monday/Saturday-9pm;
Cell Groups Tuesday: 7:30pm
Mid-week Service: 7:30pm
Prayer Meeting Wednesday: 7:30pm
Leader's Bible Study Friday: 7:30 pm
Cornerstone School of Ministry Saturday: 7:30pm

Episcopal/Anglican Church on Saipan
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Worship Service Sunday: Holy Communion 9:00am
Place: Vicarage, Chalan Laulau,
Call 235-0545 for directions

Grace Christian Assembly, Saipan
Worship Service: 9am
GBI Classes: 4-6pm
Prayer Meeting: Monday-Saturday: 6am
Sunday: 7am
Home Cell Bible Study: Wednesday-Friday: 7pm
Youth Service: Friday: 5:30pm

Iglesia Ni Cristo, Saipan
Wednesday: 7:45pm (Tagalog)
Thursday: 5:30am (English); 7:45 pm (English)
Saturday: 5:30am (Tagalog); 7:45pm (Tagalog)
Sunday: 6:45am (English)
Children Worship Service: Sunday, 9am (English)

Immanuel United Methodist Church Koblerville
Sunday Services
9:00 AM
Place of the church-next to Mt. Carmel Cathedral on Chalan Kanoa Dr. • Tel: 322-6158
Pastor JJ Matsumoto

Immanuel Methodist Church (Filipino Congregation)
Sunday: 7:00am-Choir Rehearsal
8:00am-Church Service (Tagalog)
9:15am-Sunday School
Wednesday: 6:30pm, home group
8:00pm-Prayer Meeting
Thursday: 7:30pm-Choir Practice (Church)
Saturday: 8:00pm-Choir Practice (Parsonage)

Jesus is Lord Church, Saipan
English Service: 9-11am, Sunday
Tagalog Service: 6-8pm, Sunday

Korean Presbyterian Church, Saipan
Sunday School: 8:20am
Sunday Adult: 10am
Sunday Adult: 11:30am
Sunday Evening: 7:30pm
Wednesday: 8pm

Life in the Son Christian Fellowship, Saipan
Sunday Worship Service: 10am–12noon
Tuesday: Leadership Institute 7pm-10pm
Wednesday: Corporate prayer 7pm-8pm
Last Friday of the month-prayer: 7pm-11pm
Friday: Youth on Fire: 7pm-9pm
Tel. No. 235-LIFE (5433)

Marianas Baptist Church, Saipan
English Worship Service: 9-10:30am
Evening Worship Service: 6-7pm
Children Sunday School: 9-10:30am
Tagalog Sunday School: 11am-12pm
English Sunday School: 11am-12pm
Korean Worship Service: 11am-12pm
Wednesday Prayer Meeting:
English, 7pm-8pm
Korean: 8:30pm-9:30pm

Missions Connection Ministry
Every Sunday Celebrations:
10am (English), 6pm (Tagalog)
Wednesday Bible Study: 7pm
Youth Impact Friday: 7pm
Saturday Prayer Meeting: 7pm

Northern Marianas Christian Church
Sunday Worship Service 10am Fina Sisu Housing FS#1 (Child care will be provided)
Friday Services @ 7pm Fina Sisu FS#1 for more info pls. contact Ryan 484-2620

Saipan Bible Fellowship Church
Sunday School: 9:30-10am
Divine Worship: 10am-11:30am
Evening Service: 7pm-8:30pm
Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8pm-9pm

Saipan Christian Church
Sunday: 7:30am-10am
Sunday: 6:30 pm -9pm
Monday: 8 pm -10pm (Prayer Meeting)
Thursday: 8pm-10pm (Cell Groups)

Saipan Church of Christ
Sunday Bible Class: 9am
Sunday Worship: 10am
Sunday Worship English: 6pm
Sunday Worship Tagalog: 7pm
Wednesday Bible Study: 7:30pm

Saipan Community Church
(Sunday Services)
Palau Service: 7:30am-9am
English Service: 10am-11:30am
Chuukese Service: 1pm-2:30pm
Filipino Service: 5:00pm-7:00pm

Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Saipan
(Saturday Church Services)
Sabbath School Program: 9-10am
Lesson Study: 10-10:40am
Divine Service: 11-12pm
Visitation: 3-4pm
Adventist Youth Program: 4:30-5:30pm
Sundown Worship: 6-7pm

First Baptist Church
(Formerly Saipan Baptist Church)
Afetna St., San Antonio
Sunday
9am Sunday school
10am Regular worship
6pm worship
Wednesday
7pm worship
Everyone is warmly welcome to attend our worship services. Transportation is readily available to anyone who needs a ride to our church. For further information, please call Pastor David M. Mclure at 234-1939/235-7779.

Thy Word Ministries Saipan Faith Center
Phone 234-0209
New Christian Charismatic Church Service located in Chalan Paio, Beach Road in the Sablan building on the 2nd floor above Subway Sandwiches.
Senior Pastors: George & Gail Kamakahi
Asst. Pastors: Eric & Penny Sakaguchi
Service Times
Sunday 10:00am Worship Service
Sunday 7pm Discipleship Classes
Tuesday 10:00am Bible Studies
Tuesday 6:00pm Intercessory Prayer
Tuesday 7:00pm Music Practice
Wednesday 7:00pm Mid-Week Service
Saturday 10:00am Evangelism

Upper Room International Ministries
Sunday 5:30am-6:30am
Morning prayer
7am-9am English service
7am-9am Sunday school
10am-12noon English service, Koblerville
Wednesday 7pm-9pm Prayer meeting
Saturday 7pm-9pm Tagalog service
Venue: Jason Presbyterian Church
Gualo Rai, Saipan

Victory Chapel Christian Fellowship Church
Sunday School: 9:30am
Sunday AM Worship:10:30am
Sunday PM Worship:7:00am
Wed Worship: 7:30pm
Prayer 45 min. Prior to Service Times
Morning Prayer: 6-8am M-S

Flashback
A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

February 28, 2000

Teno eyes $10 million cut in deficit this year

With wider cost-cutting measures and economic revitalization programs already in place, the Tenorio Administration is hoping to reduce the cumulative budget deficit by another $10 million this fiscal year. The $80.6 million budget deficit was down to $70.7 million by end of Fiscal Year 1999. Government officials attribute the landmark reduction to drastic austerity measures instituted by Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio. The administration is counting on the trend set by austerity measures during the previous fiscal year which allowed the government to reduce waste and excessive spending by $53 million.

House clears way for revival of 80 MW power plant

The House of Representatives on Friday followed the lead taken by the upper chamber of the CNMI Legislature as it cleared the road for the revival of the controversial 80-megawatt power plant project. Members of the lower house approved a Senate-sponsored legislation aimed at forcing the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation to adhere to the original proposal despite recommendation from a private firm suggesting that CUC build a smaller power plant. Speaker Ben Fitial said the time and public money consumed for the proposed Saipan power plant had necessitated the Legislature's intervention on the project, despite objection by some House members including Rep. Heinz Hofschneider.

February 28, 2001

Army of Wiseman supporters calls for prompt confirmation

Representative Stanley Torres' plan to block the confirmation of David A, Wiseman's nomination as Superior Court associate judge appeared to have landed in vain after an army of the lawyer's supporters flocked a public hearing yesterday. The Senate gallery was unusually filled with people who were all eager to witness how the public hearing called by the Executive Appointments and Governmental Investigations Committee on Mr. Wiseman's nomination would turn out. Mr. Wiseman's "cheering gallery" ranged from government officials to his wife, Faith. In her impassioned testimony, Mrs. Wiseman revealed how the accusations of Mr. Torres had deeply hurt her family and that "the past two months have been torture for her."

Excise tax collection rose 10%

In what appears to be a relief from financial upheavals, the CNMI government reported a landmark increase in the amount of revenues generated from excise taxes in the first three quarters of the fiscal year 2000. A report on economic indicators prepared by the Department of Commerce revealed government earnings from excise taxes jumped 10.4 percent to $15.9 million in the January-September 2000 period from the previous year's 14.4 million. Government collection of excise taxes has been on an steady increase until the adverse effects of the Asian financial crisis fanned towards the Northern Marianas in 1998, when it took a record fall of 17 percent.

February 28, 2002

Another revenue whammy for NMI

Since 1999, user fee collections in the CNMI has consistently been declining and the Department of Commerce estimates that by 2005, user fee collections may actually plunge to as low as just $1 million. Although the excise tax collections were more consistent on a year-to-year basis, collections starting October 2001 up to January this year have also been steadily going down, which could jeopardize the overall excise tax collections for Fiscal Year 2001-2002. Based on data provided by the CNMI Division of Customs, the highest recorded amount of user fee collections by the division was in 1999, reaching $39.26 million.

SC upholds ruling in prostitution case

The Supreme Court has upheld a lower court ruling that convicted a western Garapan club worker of promoting prostitution in the second degree in February 2000. Yi Xiou Zhen appealed her conviction before the high court, raising several issues, which were all refuted by the three-member appellate consisted of Associate Justice Alexandro Castro, Justice Pro Temp Virginia Sablan-Onerheim and Chief Justice Miguel S. Demapan. The appellant, through counsel G. Anthony Long, had first argued that her constitutional rights were violated when she was not granted a jury trial.

Business

Obama budget: Mammoth deficits but headed lower

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Barack Obama charted a dramatic new course for the nation Thursday with a bold but contentious budget proposing higher taxes for the wealthy and the first steps toward guaranteed health care for all—accompanied by an astonishing $1.75 trillion federal deficit that would be nearly four times the highest in history.

Denouncing what he called the "dishonest accounting" of recent federal budgets, Obama unveiled his own $3.6 trillion blueprint for next year, a bold proposal that would transfer wealth from rich taxpayers to the middle class and the poor.

Congressional approval without major change is anything but sure. The plan is filled with political land mines including an initiative to combat global warming that would hit consumers with considerably higher utility bills. Other proposals would take on entrenched interests such as big farming, insurance companies and drug makers.

Obama

Obama blamed the expected federal deficit explosion on a "deep and destructive" recession and recent efforts to battle it including the Wall Street bailout and the just-passed $787 billion stimulus plan. The $1.75 trillion deficit estimate for this year is $250 billion more than projected just days ago because of proposed new spending for a fresh bailout for banks and other financial institutions.

As the nation digs out of the most serious economic crisis in decades, Obama said, "We will, each and every one of us, have to compromise on certain things we care about but which we simply cannot afford right now."

Signaling budget battles to come, Republicans were skeptical Obama was doing without much at all.

"We can't tax and spend our way to prosperity," said House GOP leader John Boehner of Ohio. "The era of big government is back, and Democrats are asking you to pay for it."

Obama plans to move aggressively toward rebalancing the tax system, extending a $400 tax credit for most workers—$800 for couples—while letting expire President George W. Bush's tax cuts for couples making more than $250,000 a year. That would raise the top income tax bracket from 35 percent to 39.6 percent for those taxpayers and raise their capital gains rate from 15 to 20 percent as well.

Thursday's 134-page budget submission, a nonbinding recommendation to Congress, says the plan would close the deficit to a more reasonable—but still eye-popping—$533 billion after five years. That would still be higher than last year's record $455 billion deficit.

And the national debt would more than double by the end of the upcoming decade, raising worries that so much federal borrowing could drive up interest rates and erode the value of the dollar.

Also, to narrow the budget gap, Obama relies on rosier predictions of economic growth—including a 3.2 percent boost in the economy next year—than most private sector economists foresee.

There is already resistance from Democrats who are upset with the budget's plan to curb the ability of wealthier people to reduce their tax bills through deductions for mortgage interest, charitable contributions and state and local taxes.

That tax hike would raise $318 billion over the upcoming decade toward a down payment on Obama's high-priority universal health care plan. Cuts to the Medicare and Medicaid federal health programs would supply an additional $316 billion, but that still wouldn't provide enough money to guarantee coverage for all, and Obama wants Congress to come up with hundreds of billions of dollars in additional hard-to-raise revenues to pay for the rest.

Then there is the proposed clampdown on the Pentagon budget, which would get a 4 percent boost, to $534 billion next year, but would then get increases of 2 percent or less over the next several years. Domestic programs favored by Democrats would, on average, receive a 7 percent boost over regularly appropriated levels - even as many agencies are already swimming in cash from the just-enacted economic stimulus plan.

Taken together, Obama's plan contains so many difficult-to-digest ideas that it's virtually certain to be significantly redrafted during debates later this year.

"It's going to be a tough row to hoe, but he has large Democratic majorities and a lot of popular support and we're in times of crisis," said Robert Reischauer, president of the Urban Institute. "So his prospects of him getting much of what he is seeking, while not good, are higher than ... we've seen in the past."

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D., predicted Congress would pass much of Obama's plan, though with significant revisions. For instance, he's unimpressed with a proposal to reduce payments to farming operations with sales above $500,000 per year and says the plan to curb tax deductions for the wealthy faces uncertain prospects because of opposition from lawmakers from high tax states and universities whose endowments have shrunk.

Nation

Officials: Obama says Iraq pullout by Aug 2010

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Barack Obama told lawmakers on Thursday he plans to withdraw most American troops from Iraq by August 2010 but leave tens of thousands behind to advise Iraqi forces and protect U.S. interests, congressional officials said.

Obama is expected to announce the new strategy on Friday during a trip to the Marine Corps base at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

In a closed-door meeting with Republican and Democratic leaders, Obama and his top advisers estimated that 35,000 to 50,000 troops would remain in Iraq after the bulk of troops are withdrawn.

Obama campaigned on ending the Iraq war and pledged to do so in 16 months. The withdrawal timetable he is expected to approve stretches over 19 months from his inauguration in January. That means some 100,000 troops would leave over the coming 18 months.

Rep. John McHugh, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said Obama promised him to reconsider the new strategy if violence rises. McHugh said he was worried the situation in Iraq remained fragile, especially as it approaches elections in December.

"Our commanders must have the flexibility they need in order to respond to these challenges, and President Obama assured me that there is a 'Plan B,'" McHugh, R-N.Y., said in a statement.

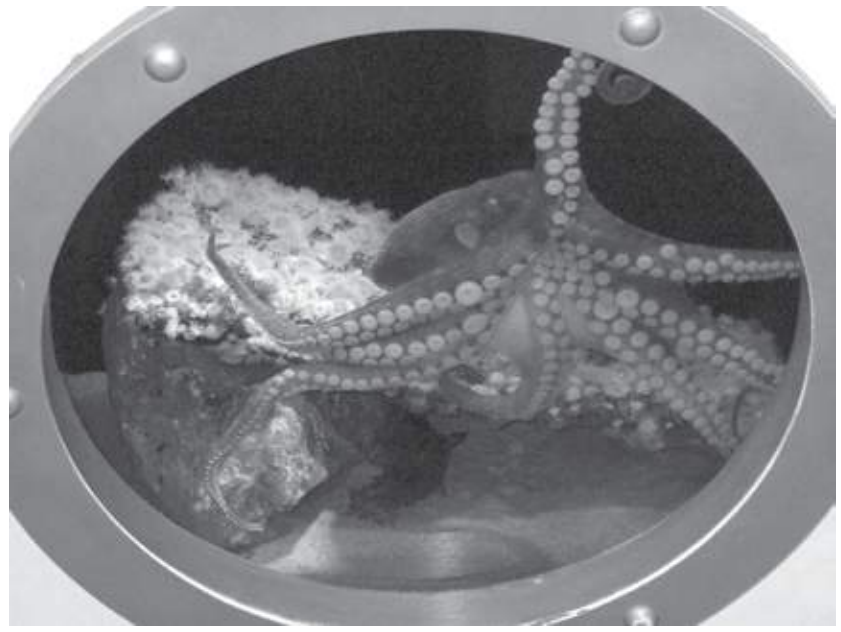
According to one congressional official, lawmakers were told that Gen. David Petraeus, head of U.S. Central Command, and Gen. Ray Odierno, the top commander in Baghdad, believed the plan presented moderate risk but supported the 50,000 figure.

Some Democrats are skeptical but because they say it would leave too many troops behind.

"I have been one for a long time that's called for significant cutbacks in Iraq, and I am happy to listen to the secretary of defense and the president," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., told reporters before the briefing. "But when they talk about 50,000, that's a little higher number than I had anticipated."

In addition to Reid, congressional leaders attending the meeting included House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio. Vice President Joe Biden, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had also been expected to attend as well.

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told the U.N.'s Security Council on Thursday that the U.S. would move "responsibly and safely" to reduce the U.S. military presence in Iraq.



CURIOUS OCTOPUS AP

This image provided by Heal the Bay shows a two-spotted octopus, a tiny female known for being curious and gregarious with visitors, and believed to be responsible for causing a tank leak at the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium on Tuesday Feb. 24, 2009 in Santa Monica, Calif.

Gates: Media photos of war dead need families' OK

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Obama administration is reversing an 18-year ban on news coverage of the return of war dead, allowing photographs of flag-covered caskets when families of the fallen troops agree, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday.

"My conclusion was we should not presume to make the decision for the families," Gates said in announcing results of a quick review of a ban that had stood through Republican and Democratic administrations.

Although details are being worked out, the new policy will give families a choice of whether to admit the press to ceremonies at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, the entry point to the United States for the caskets of overseas war dead.

President Barack Obama asked for a re-examination of the blanket ban and supports the decision to change it, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said.

"I have always believed that the decision as to how to honor our fallen heroes should be left up to the families," Vice President Joe Biden said. "The past practice didn't account for a family's wishes and I believed that was wrong."

Critics including some Democrats and liberal groups claim the government was trying to hide the human cost of war by preventing modern versions of an iconic image from long-ago wars: a line of flag-wrapped coffins coming home.

"We should honor, not hide, flag-draped coffins," said Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J. "They are a symbol of the respect, honor and dignity that our fallen heroes deserve."

Lautenberg had written Obama this month asking him to consider lifting the ban put in place by President George H.W. Bush in 1991, at the time of the Gulf War.

From the start, the ban has been cast as a way to shield grieving families.

Advocates for veterans and military families are split on the issue; some say they want the world to honor fallen troops or see the price of defending the country.

"There has never been a greater disconnect between those who serve in harms warm and those back home," said Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "All too often, the sacrifices of our military are hidden from view."

Colleges warn students about Mexico travel

PHOENIX (AP)—The U.S. State Department and universities around the country are warning college students headed for Mexico for some spring-break partying of a surge in drug-related murder and mayhem south of the border.

"We're not necessarily telling students not to go, but we're going to certainly alert them," said Tom Dougan, vice president for student affairs at the University of Rhode Island. "There have been Americans kidnapped, and if you go you need to be very aware and very alert to this fact."

More than 100,000 high school- and college-age Americans travel to Mexican resort areas during spring break each year. Much of the drug violence is happening in border towns, and tourists have generally not been targeted, though there have been killings in the big spring-break resorts of Acapulco and Cancun, well away from the border.

The University of Arizona in Tucson is urging its approximately 37,000 students not to go to Mexico. Other universities—in the Southwest and far beyond, including Penn State, Notre Dame, the University of Colorado and the University at Buffalo—said they would call students' attention to the travel warning issued Feb. 20 by the State Department.

The State Department stopped short of warning spring breakers not to go to Mexico, but advised them to avoid areas of prostitution and drug-dealing and take other commonsense precautions.

"Sage advice," said Tom Mangan, a spokesman for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "We have had documented violence, attacks, killings, shootouts with the drug cartels involving not only the military but law enforcement personnel. It is indiscriminate violence, and certainly innocent people have been caught up in that collateral damage."

Mexico's drug cartels are waging a bloody fight among themselves for smuggling routes and against government forces, carrying out massacres and dumping beheaded bodies in the streets. More than 6,000 people were killed in drug violence in Mexico last year.

But Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora said in an interview with The Associated Press: "There is no major risk for students coming into Mexico in general terms. It is always important to advise the youngsters to behave."

Despite the bloodshed, the number of foreign tourists visiting Mexico surged to 23 million in 2008, up 5.9 percent from the year before, spurred in part by the tumbling value of the peso against the dollar, according to the country's Tourism Department. The department estimates 80 percent of tourists in Mexico come from the United States.

4 members of assisted suicide group are arrested

ATLANTA (AP)—Joining the Final Exit Network costs $50, and the privileges of membership include this: When you're ready to die, the organization will send two "exit guides" to show you how to suffocate yourself using helium tanks and a plastic hood. The Georgia-based organization says it is providing an invaluable and humane service. Authorities call it a crime.

Four members of the Final Exit Network, including its president and its medical director, were arrested Wednesday and charged with assisted suicide in the death of 58-year-old John Celmer last June at his home near Atlanta. Investigators said the organization may have been involved in as many as 200 other deaths around the country.

"The law is very clear, and they clearly violated it," said Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokesman John Bankhead.

The arrests came after an eight-month investigation in which an undercover agent posing as someone bent on suicide infiltrated the Final Exit Network, which bases its work on "The Final Exit," a best-selling suicide manual by British author Derek Humphry.

Members of the Final Exit Network are instructed to buy two new helium tanks and a hood, known as an "exit bag," according to the GBI. In court papers, investigators said the organization recommends helium because it is undetectable during an autopsy.

The network, which was founded in 2004 and claims 3,000 members, donors and volunteers nationwide, has long operated in the open. It has its own Web site, and its leaders have held news conferences and appeared at paid speaking engagements.

The group's members bristle at the term assisted suicide, saying they don't actively aid suicides but rather support and guide those who decide to end their lives.

ACROSS THE NATION

Woman infected with herpes wins $7M in Calif. suit

LOS ANGELES (AP)—A jury awarded nearly $7 million to a 56-year-old woman who said she was unknowingly infected with herpes by the 77-year-old founder of a hair-care company. The lawsuit alleged that Thomas Redmond knew he had genital herpes for more than 25 years but did not disclose it before his sexual relationship began with Patricia Behr, and did not use a condom. The Riverside County jury awarded Behr $4 million in compensatory damages and $2.75 million in punitive damages. She was also awarded a 2004 BMW car that Redmond had originally given her as a gift.

Pa. man could serve 6 months for boy's 1985 death

POTTSVILLE, Pa. (AP)—For more than two decades, only Joseph Geiger knew how David Reed had died—a fatal punch to the 13-year-old he suspected of stealing his marijuana plants. He kept to himself the panic that pushed him to bury the teen's body in a thicket of branches and leaves. On Thursday, six months after state police cracked the case of Reed's 1985 death, Geiger pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and three lesser charges in a deal that will send him to prison for one to two years. With time already served, he could be paroled in August. Prosecutors agreed to drop a third-degree murder charge in exchange for the plea. The eastern Pennsylvania man was 20 years old when he confronted Reed while the two were smoking pot inside a parked caboose. Geiger punched the teen in the face, causing Reed to hit his head on the metal wall behind him and die. Panicked and scared, Geiger dragged the teenager's body into a thicket where it was left to the elements and torn apart by dogs.

3 charged in La. swap of 2 kids for pet bird, cash

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—A Louisiana woman is accused of trading two young children in her care for a pet cockatoo and $175 cash from a couple who had been trying for years to have their own child, authorities said Thursday. Donna Greenwell, 53, a long-haul trucker with an arrest record from Pitkin, is charged with aggravated kidnapping, along with would-be adoptive parents Paul J. Romero, 46, and Brandy Lynn Romero, 27, of Evangeline Parish. "The Romeros had good intentions from what we see," said Keith Dupre, a detective with the Evangeline Parish Sheriff's Office. "They really wanted to take care of the kids. The kids were well-dressed and seemed to be treated good by the Romero family." The transaction for the 5-year-old boy and the 4-year-old girl was negotiated by phone after Greenwell spotted a flier posted at a livestock barn selling a cockatoo for $1,500 and called the Romeros on Feb. 18, Dupre said.

Asia

Bangladesh mutiny ends after tanks enter capital

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP)—Tanks rolled through the Bangladeshi capital Thursday in a show of force that finally persuaded mutinous border guards to lay down their arms, ending a two-day revolt that threatened to spread across the impoverished South Asian nation.

At least 18 people were killed in the insurrection after the nearly 2,000 guards opened fire on their senior officers and seized their headquarters to protest poor pay and conditions.

Concerned about reports of dozens still missing, firefighters searched the area through the night and recovered seven more bodies, fire official Dilip Kumar Ghosh said early Friday.

He said two of the bodies—a man and a woman—were found at the home of the border force's chief, Maj. Gen. Shakil Ahmed, but the commander was not one of them.

One officer said earlier that he saw Ahmed killed immediately after the mutiny began Wednesday.

"I was confronted by the soldiers three times, but I have survived," that officer, Lt. Col. Syed Kamruzzaman, told ATN Bangla television station. "Allah has saved me from the face of death."

Authorities did not make any statement about the chief's whereabouts.

The mutinous guards had agreed to surrender after the government promised Wednesday to give them amnesty and agreed to look into their demands.

Shantytown welcomes home its 'Slumdog' kids

AP

"Slumdog Millionaire" child actor Rubina Ali, 9, is welcomed back on her return to her home at a slum in Bandra, in suburban Mumbai, India, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009.

MUMBAI, India (AP)—From the shantytown's corrugated tin roofs to its squalid streets, proud relatives and neighbors cheered, celebrated and warmly embraced the two child stars of the Oscar-winning "Slumdog Millionaire" who returned home Thursday.

Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail, who portrays Salim, the hero's brother, displayed some fancy Bollywood moves as he danced to the throbbing music from the movie, embodying the exuberant spirit of its popular song, "Jai Ho"—"Be Victorious."

His father, Mohammed Ismail, wore a spotless white shirt and trousers and looked on in pride as the 10-year-old entertained the crowd in the Bandra slum, north of Mumbai.

Young Azharuddin—Azhar to his friends—did some more dancing after arriving at his lean-to of plastic tarpaulins and moldy blankets.

Rubina Ali, 9, who plays the film's heroine, Latika, as a child, was carried on her father's shoulders, waving at people who gathered on the rickety roofs and on balconies draped with rugs and filthy plastic sheets.

ASIAN BRIEFS

NKorea lashes out over missile-test warnings

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea lashed out at critics warning it not to test a long-range missile, saying Thursday that it would punish those trying to disrupt its plan to send what it calls a satellite into orbit. The latest harsh words from Pyongyang came as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced plans to send her new envoy on North Korea to meet with negotiators in Asia trying to revive stalled nuclear disarmament talks. North Korea announced earlier this week that it was preparing to shoot a communication satellite into orbit as part of it space program. The U.S., South Korea and other neighboring countries believe the launch may be a cover for a missile test-fire, saying the action would trigger international sanctions. On Thursday, the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of (North) Korea accused South Korea of "trumpeting about 'sanctions'" against its satellite launch, saying outsiders will know "what will soar in the air in the days ahead."

US aid effort under fire in Pakistan border area

ISLAMABAD (AP)—A major U.S. effort to erode support for the Taliban and al-Qaida by pumping millions of aid dollars into the violence-wracked Afghan border region is being threatened by attacks on aid workers, corruption and layers of bureaucracy. The Obama administration has pledged to use development aid as a foreign policy tool, and is expected to unveil a new hike in assistance before April. But there are concerns about how the money is being spent in remote valleys too dangerous for foreign aid workers to venture and where residents risk a beheading if they cross the militants. A Taliban commander in the North Waziristan border region warned residents last month to shun the "sweet poison" of development aid. "Wait for the consequences, if anybody accepts anything," Gul Bahadur warned in a leaflet.

World

Mexico's president hopes to quell drug violence by 2012

MEXICO CITY (AP)—President Felipe Calderon hopes to quell Mexico's rampant drug violence by the end of his term in 2012, and disputes U.S. fears that Mexico is losing control of its territory.

In interviews with The Associated Press on Thursday, Calderon and his top prosecutor said the violence that killed 6,290 people last year—and more than 1,000 in the first eight weeks of 2009—is a sign that the cartels are under pressure from military and police operations nationwide, as well as turf wars among themselves.

"To say that Mexico is a failed state is absolutely false," Calderon said. "I have not lost any part—any single part—of Mexican territory."

Calderon, a Harvard-educated conservative, said smuggling cannot be eliminated as long as Americans continue to use drugs, but hopes he can beat back the cartels by 2012 to a point that the army and federal police can withdraw and leave the problem in the hands of local law enforcement. He declined to give a specific timeline for winning the war against drug gangs.

Calderon easily switched between English and Spanish in an hourlong interview at the colonial National Palace. Sitting in a chair decorated with Mexico's national symbol—an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a serpent—he was relaxed and jovial.

Mexico had bristled when the U.S. Joint Forces Command put it on par with Pakistan, saying both were at risk of "rapid and sudden collapse."

Engine trouble possible cause in Dutch plane crash

AMSTERDAM (AP)—Engine trouble may have caused the Turkish Airlines crash that killed nine people in the Netherlands, the head of the agency investigating the accident said Thursday. Separately, officials said those killed were five Turks and four Americans.

Flight TK1951 from Istanbul crashed about one mile (1.5 kilometers) short of the runway at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport on Wednesday morning, smashing into three pieces and spraying luggage and debris across a field. It was carrying 135 passengers and crew.

Chief investigator Pieter van Vollenhoven said, in remarks quoted by Dutch state television NOS, that the Boeing 737-800 had fallen almost directly from the sky, which pointed toward the plane's engines having stopped. He said a reason for that had not yet been established.

Spokeswoman Sandra Groenendal of the Dutch Safety Authority confirmed his remarks and added that engine failure on the was still only "one of the possible scenarios" for the crash.

Van Vollenhoven said an analysis of the plane's flight data recorders in Paris could be completed as early as Friday, but his agency would probably not make a preliminary finding until next week.

Medvedev: Russia's cautious champion of reform

MOSCOW (AP)—A year after his election as Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev seems eager to push for reform but reluctant to act.

His calls last year for democracy and justice raised hopes in Russia for an easing of the pressure on Russia's tiny liberal opposition and restoration of some of the democratic institutions dismantled by his predecessor, patron and current prime minister, Vladimir Putin.

And in recent months Medvedev and his advisers have begun publicly though gently urging some of the political, judicial and economic reforms that many expected him to seek from the start.

But the Kremlin maintains a monopoly on political power, major TV networks still move in lockstep behind the government, prominent critics of the Kremlin are occasionally assassinated, opposition protesters often beaten and harassed by police and pro-government thugs.

As Medvedev approaches Monday's election anniversary, experts say he has become increasingly vocal in support of reform, but he has not moved to reverse any of the policies of Putin, who chipped away at democratic rights during his eight years in office.

WORLD BRIEFS

Former Serb president cleared of Kosovo crimes

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP)—U.N. judges on Thursday acquitted former Serbian President Milan Milutinovic of ordering a deadly campaign of terror against Kosovo Albanians, saying he had no role in what they ruled was a criminal plot to drive ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo. The tribunal ordered Milutinovic released from custody, but it convicted five other senior Serbs and gave them prison sentences of between 15 and 22 years. It was the court's first judgment establishing widespread Serb crimes in Kosovo. Milutinovic's acquittal was a blow to prosecutors who three years ago lost their chance of convicting former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic of similar crimes when he died of a heart attack before his trial ended.

Iraq, Kuwait hold highest-level talks since Saddam

BAGHDAD (AP)—Iraq took another step toward healing its rift with Kuwait on Thursday as government leaders welcomed the highest-ranking Kuwaiti envoy since Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion. The timing of the visit by Kuwait's deputy prime minister, Sheik Mohammed Al Sabah, was symbolic—it came Kuwaitis celebrated the 18th anniversary of the U.S.-led military campaign that drove out Saddam's forces. But much of tiny Persian Gulf nation was left looted and devastated by the Iraqi occupation, and Kuwait still claims billions of dollars in war reparations. It has refused appeals by Iraq's government to reduce its demands and forgive about $15 billion in Iraqi debt.

Report: Bishop who had denied Holocaust apologizes

ROME (AP)—A British bishop whose denial of the Holocaust embroiled Pope Benedict XVI in controversy has apologized for his remarks, a Catholic news agency said Thursday. Bishop Richard Williamson, with the conservative Society of St. Pius X, had faced worldwide criticism over a television interview in which he said no Jews were gassed during the Holocaust. While Williamson apologized in a statement Thursday to all those who took offense and for the distress he caused, the bishop did not specifically say that his comments were erroneous, or that he no longer believed them. "If I had known beforehand the full harm and hurt to which they would give rise, especially to the church, but also to survivors and relatives of victims of injustice under the Third Reich, I would not have made them," Williamson was quoted as saying in the statement carried by the Zenit Catholic news agency.

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

Saturday, February 28, 2009

7 Filipino workers on consulate's list of missing

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The Philippine Consulate General in the CNMI asks for the community's help in finding seven Filipino workers who have lost contact with their families back home.

Rey Madrilejos, assistance to nationals officer at the Philippine Consulate General, yesterday said the families of these seven individuals have asked the Philippine government for help in finding these workers in the CNMI.

"One of them, Mr. Felipe E. Olimpo, has been on that list for four to five years. Others were added to the list last year. We ask the public to contact us if they know the whereabouts of these Filipino nationals or if they know anything about them that will help us get in touch with them," Madrilejos said.

He added that these persons do not have criminal cases but their families have not heard from them for a long time. To help the families, the Philippine government has started posting their names for the public to see.

Besides Felipe E. Olimpo, the others on the list are: Josefina San Nicolas, Margarita E. Seracarpio, Lamberto Nacilla, Wilfredo Ricohermoso, Johnny Rebamba, and Anthony Balicanta.

These individuals are asked to immediately contact or report to the Philippine Consulate General on the fifth floor of the Marianas Business Plaza (formerly Nauru Building) in Susupe.

Those with information about the persons on the list are asked to contact Rey Madrilejos at the Philippine Consulate General in the CNMI at tel. 234 1850/51 or fax. 234 1849.

Free health screening for OFWs on Sunday

The Philippine Consulate General will be hosting a free health screening for overseas Filipino workers this Sunday, March 1, 2009, from 7am to 12 noon at the ground floor of Marianas Business Plaza Building (former Nauru Building).

The free health screening for OFWs, which is conducted regularly every quarter of the year in cooperation with the Filipino Volunteer Medical Team and Hardt Eye Clinic, includes medical services such as blood pressure, blood sugar, and vision check-ups.

Consul General Wilfredo Maximo said that this year's quarterly health screening for OFWs will feature short lectures on topics such as how to prevent diabetes, hypertension and obesity, from the volunteer medical practitioners before the actual check-up services. He has recommended that those availing of this free health screening to come early as possible before 7am for the registration and for those having their blood sugar tested to refrain from taking solid and liquid food from 12 midnight to actual testing.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A Filipino alien worker gets her vision checked by a member of the Hardt Eye Clinic volunteer team during the last health screening for OFWs.

In 2008, the Philippine Consulate General said that 1,586 OFWs availed themselves of the free blood pressure/blood sugar and vision checks–ups. The average number of OFWs who came for the free quarterly check-ups is placed at 390.

Records of the 4th quarter of 2008 health screening activity also show that of the total 406 OFWs served, 307 OFWs had their blood pressure/blood sugar checked while 99 had their eye vision examined.

According to Maximo, he hopes that this project would continue so that "we can increase the level of awareness on the prevention of diabetes and hypertension, and as well as on the correction of eye/vision pressure among the OFWs."

Maximo said that through this project, the Philippine Consulate General hopes to reach more OFWs and serve even if in a modest way their medical needs by also fostering the spirit of volunteerism among the Medical Volunteers Team and Hardt Eye Clinic, in the true spirit of Filipino bayanihan here on Saipan. ***(PR)***

5,500 OFWs lost jobs, says RP's Arroyo

CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines (AFP)—Some 5,500 Filipino overseas workers have lost their jobs abroad and returned home over the past four months, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said Thursday.

"Since November up to today, of our eight million Filipinos abroad, only 5,500 have had to come back because they lost their jobs," she told a national convention of local government executives in this southern city.

The Department of Labor announced earlier this week that 39,000 Filipinos had lost their jobs since October, a number which included overseas workers.

It said the 39,000 included more than 5,400 overseas-based Filipinos who had lost their jobs in places such as the Middle East and Taiwan, which accounted for the bulk of the returning expatriates.

Arroyo said Thursday that the 39,000 job losses were "mostly in the export sectors of electronics, auto parts, garments and mining."

She insisted that "3,000 new jobs are being processed daily," but did not give details.

Arroyo said local officials in Metro Manila, where most of the laid-off workers in local industries live, were meeting to "address the needs of displaced workers."

She said the Philippines was more prepared than many other countries for the ongoing global financial crisis, having managed to grow its economy last year "when two-thirds of the world went into recession."

The President said that "up to late last year Filipinos had no difficulties finding and keeping their important jobs overseas or helping their families and contributing to our economy."

However, "since that time, the global financial turmoil has continued to spread and it has jeopardized the well-beings of billions of people across the globe," Arroyo said.

Filipinos warned on illegal recruitment

By KRISTINE L. ALAVE
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration has warned Filipinos against recruiters who promise them quick entry to United Kingdom, using student visas.

In a statement on Thursday, the POEA said the Philippine Embassy in London recently received reports of 34 Filipino students being victimized by London-based illegal recruiters who lured them with jobs and scholarships to the British capital.

The students were supposed to be attending the London School of Health & Management Studies, but UK authorities said the school had no nursing courses as advertised to its recruits. The POEA said the London police raided the school recently after complaints came to light.

According to the POEA, the victims paid the recruiters 2,500 - 3,500 British pounds or some US$5,000 – US$7,000 for tuition and student visa fees.

The victims also paid additional 150 British pounds for transportation expenses upon arrival in the United Kingdom.

Not only did the recruiters promise the victims that they could enter the institution, they also told the recruits that they would be given work in nursing homes, which would be credited to their school work.

? LABOR FRONT

Reduction of work hours

By FERDIE PONCE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Q: Can an employer reduce the work hours of his or her alien worker without amending the worker's existing contract?

A: Any change to an existing approved employment contract should be implemented or performed only with prior agreement of both the employer and the employee. According to the new labor reform law regulations this is provided however, that the hours may not be below 32 per week, and with prior submission on a standard form provided by the Department of Labor.

■ ■ ■

Q: Does the Labor director have the authority to deny an amendment to an employment contract?

A: The Regulations state that a contract amendment or change does not require prior approval of but may be denied by the Labor director. A denial by the Labor director may be appealed to the Labor Administrative Hearing Office within 15 days after the date of the denial.

■ ■ ■

Q: Does the employer have the right to withhold an alien employee's entry or work permit?

A: According to the Regulations, no employer may withhold from any alien worker any passport, entry or work permit, approved employment contract, or other document related to the status of the foreign national worker.

A copy of the approved employment contract should be provided to the alien worker by the employer prior to his or her arrival in the CNMI. An entry permit should be provided to the foreign national worker at Labor's orientation session.

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Fully automated 2010 elections in peril

By KRISTINE L. ALAVE, TJ BURGONIO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—The Commission on Elections may have to abandon its plan to fully automate the 2010 elections because of Congress' delay in passing the P11.3-billion automation budget has compromised election preparations, according to Comelec Chair Jose Melo.

Melo said the Comelec is considering the idea of partially computerizing the 2010 polls as the delay in the release of the budget has considerably reduced the time to prepare for the country's first-ever national computerized elections.

"We are really pressed for time. We are toying with the idea that it won't be full capacity. Maybe we will automate 50 percent, not nationwide," he said.

The Comelec had planned on fully computerizing the voting and canvassing of the 2010 presidential and national elections, as it is mandated by law.

Automating the process will also mean a faster count and less human intervention, which could lead to fraud, it said.

It asked Congress to pass the P11.3-billion supplemental budget for poll automation before legislators go on a break on March 6 to give the poll body ample time to prepare for the bidding for the machines.

But complaints and questions from the House of Representatives about the automation process has stalled the passage of the supplemental budget.

The Senate finance committee deferred the approval of the bill pending its final approval by the House. Both chambers are taking a month-long break beginning next week, and resume sessions on April 13.

Sen. Edgardo Angara, the finance committee chair, said it was likely Congress would pass the appropriations bill when it resumes sessions on April 13.

Malacañang on Thursday reminded legislators that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo wants to leave automated elections as her legacy amid concerns over the delayed passage of a budget for the process.

Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Anthony Golez said the P11.3-billion supplemented budget for poll automation had been certified as urgent by Arroyo.

'JUST A DRILL' AP

Students hide under their school desks inside the classroom upon hearing the signal commencing the simultaneous earthquake drill Friday, Feb. 27, 2009, in suburban Quezon City, north of Manila, Philippines. The National Disaster Coordinating Council conducted the drill to prepare students for a disaster or calamities.

UN probes case of Filipina girl in Japan; 13-yr-old faces separation from parents

TOKYO (AFP)—United Nations human rights experts are looking into the case of a 13-year-old Filipina girl in Japan who is on the verge of being separated from her parents, a Japanese official said Thursday.

Japan has received an "emergency inquiry" from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights into the case of Noriko Calderon, whose parents face deportation, the foreign ministry official said, asking not to be named.

The family's temporary permission to stay in Japan expires on Friday.

Noriko was born in Japan and is expected to be allowed to stay to finish her studies. She has repeatedly asked the Justice Ministry to rescind an order for her Philippine parents to be deported with or without their only daughter.

The couple entered Japan in the early 1990s with illegal passports and stayed in the country undetected until two years ago when her mother was arrested. Last September the Supreme Court rejected their appeal to stay.

Noriko has grown up speaking only Japanese and attending local schools.

"I would choose neither to leave the country with my parents nor to stay here alone," she told reporters on Thursday.

"I don't want to be separated from my parents. If I go to the Philippines, I would not be able to continue my education."

The family's lawyer said that if the girl went to the Philippines she would have to start primary school again due to language difficulties.

The parents must report to the immigration authorities on Friday and the father, or both, may be detained "as a leverage to press the family to leave the country," suggested the lawyer, Shogo Watanabe.

"Japan is a member of the UN Human Rights Council," he said. "Japan must not ignore any move by the council."

The immigration bureau said it would continue the deportation process for now.

"The request for information alone would not affect the procedure, which will be done in accordance with Japanese law," an official said.

Pacquiao puts political plans on hold

By ALLISON LOPEZ
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Manny Pacquiao is deferring any announcement on his next political plans but he has an appeal to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) and those involved in the political process—keep the 2010 polls clean.

At a press conference at the Renaissance Hotel in Makati City Thursday, mediamen waited with anticipation for his announcement that he would run for Congress in Sarangani province next year.

But they were disappointed.

"Maybe not now," Pacquiao said, speaking in Filipino. "Let's just leave that to my lawyer. The reason I came here is to appeal to everyone to make the elections clean."

He said Filipinos should unite to make sure that no cheating or bribery would occur during the polls.

"I am appealing to the Comelec to keep the elections clean ... You've seen me. I fight cleanly when I'm in the ring. I do not know how to cheat. Let's hope that's also what happens in 2010, that no one will cheat or resort to bribery ... Let's not make our people spend all their energies during the election and then not count their votes in the end."

Pacquiao, however, made it clear that in making the appeal he was not insinuating that he felt cheated in the 2007 congressional elections, which he lost to Gen. Santos City Rep. Darlene Antonino-Custodio.

His election lawyer, Romulo Macalintal, stressed that while Pacquiao was seriously considering running for a government post again, the champion came to the press conference only to join the call of others for clean elections.

PHILIPPINE BRIEFS

Saudi Airlines in Manila receives threat

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Manila airport authorities have tightened security for Saudi Arabian Airlines after receiving intelligence reports of possible security threats against the airline. Robert Uy, senior assistant general manager at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, said airport authorities have doubled the number of guards posted at the airline's office and are enforcing stricter baggage checks. The Philippine Foreign Affairs Department would only confirm that it had received a request from a Middle Eastern embassy for added security measures at Manila airport. Phones rang unanswered Thursday night at the airline's offices. No further details were available.

Disgruntled Filipino soldier kills 3 superiors

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—A sergeant described as depressed opened fire inside army headquarters in Manila on Thursday, killing three of his superiors before escaping, a military spokesman said. The suspect, Sgt. Elias Tial, was on guard duty late Wednesday when he went to a common area at a barracks and allegedly shot his commanding officer and three others with an M-16 rifle, said army spokesman Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner. Two victims died the same night and one died Thursday, he said. Another officer was being treated, he said. Brawner said Tial was apparently upset over the death of his father and was seeking permission to attend his burial. Before the shooting, he criticized his commanders for not letting soldiers with problems go home, Brawner said. "What we are looking at is depression, because his father died last Saturday and then last month, his uncle died," he said. Brawner said Tial had been allowed to go on leave starting Thursday. A manhunt has been launched to find him, he said.

13 Filipinos in Nigeria oil theft freed

MANILA, Philippines—Less than a week after they were convicted of stealing 12,500 tons of crude oil from the Niger Delta, 13 Filipino seafarers were released Thursday afternoon, the Department of Foreign Affairs said. Citing a report from the Office of the Vice President, DFA acting spokesman Ed Malay said the 13 were released after the owner of the M/T Akuada, Corinthian City, paid the fine of $6,800 for each seaman. Last Friday, February 20, a Nigerian court sentenced the Filipinos to five years imprisonment or the fine after they were caught on November 13, 2008 stealing or illegally transporting oil, commonly known as oil bunkering. Nigeria, one of Africa's largest oil producers, exporting some two million barrels of oil per day, loses an estimated 100,000 barrels of liters of crude or refined petroleum products every day to organized gangs that tap pipelines and siphon off tons of oil. ***(INQUIRER.net)***

7 Filipinos jailed in Maldives

By JEROME ANING
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Seven Filipino workers at a coffee shop in the Maldives, a chain of islands in the Indian Ocean, are seeking help from the Philippine government to have theft charges against them dropped so they could be repatriated.

The workers sought the assistance of Migrante-Middle East after a plea bargaining attempt initiated by Philippine consular officials resulted in their being sentenced to longer prison terms and bigger fines.

In a statement sent to the Philippine Daily Inquirer, John Leonard Monterona, Migrante-ME regional coordinator, identified the Filipinos employed at the Dome Cafe at the Maldives International Airport as Kenneth Navarro, Lito Lago, Dario Agao, Christian Ryan Pineda, Jeffrey Jenkins, Gilbert Bendana and Joey Omawas.

They were employed by Hassan Bagir and were originally recruited by the Centaur Manpower Services Inc. in Makati City.

The seven were charged with theft and fraud for allegedly stealing a customer's credit card and receiving items bought through the card in May last year. All seven were jailed for a month-and-a-half but were later conditionally freed and reinstated while their case was heard by a local court.

On February 17, they were sentenced to 25 years in prison and ordered to pay 100,000 Maldivean rufiyaas (about P378,000) in damages.

Monterona said a concerned Filipino resident in Maldives brought to Migrante's attention the seven's plight, pleading for their safety and repatriation. The OFW group has called on the Philippine Embassy in Bangladesh, which also represents the Philippines in the Maldives, to provide a lawyer for the seven.

Monterona said the OFWs complained about new sworn statements admitting their guilt that Philippine consular officials made them sign and submit to the police prior to a hearing on February 12.

In their letter, the OFWs said they were made to believe that if they signed the new statements, they would be deported back to the Philippines whether they were found guilty or not guilty, Monterona said.

The court, however, found that their statements were "conflicting" and ruled that all of them were guilty.

After the final hearing on February 17, the seven recounted that they were herded to a prison for common criminals in Male, the capital, but they objected, saying they had not yet accepted their sentence. They were eventually given 15 days to make an appeal.

Business confidence falls to seven-year low

By MICHELLE REMO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Businesses in the Philippines have become more pessimistic about their prospects in the near term because of the expected adverse impact of the global economic turmoil on their profitability, according to the latest Business Expectations Survey of the central bank.

The survey showed the business confidence index plunged deeper into negative territory, t0 -23.9 percent in the first quarter of the year.

The survey was conducted from Jan. 5 to Feb. 11 among 1,410 respondents. Survey participants include exporters, importers and those who buy raw materials from and sell goods solely to the domestic market.

The first quarter confidence index was the lowest since the first quarter of 2002, when the index improved to 5.9 percent after hitting a low of -32.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2001. The drop in the fourth quarter 2001 index was due to the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, said the central bank, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

A negative index meant there were more pessimists than optimists among the survey respondents.

"The prevailing pessimism is due to weaker customer demand brought about by a possible decline in disposable income given the fragile economic environment," Iluminada Sicat, director at the BSP economic statistics department, said at a news briefing Thursday.

While the easing of the prices of crude and other commodities may have positive effects on consumption, many fear that the benefits may be outweighed by the ill-effects of the global turmoil.

Recession in advanced economies was believed to drag down demand for Philippine-made products and this may weigh down on domestic income levels, Sicat said.

The survey divided the business community into four sectors: industry, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and services. The survey showed that of the four sectors, only construction recorded a positive confidence index of 2.2 percent, compared with 6.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2008.

The industry, wholesale and retail trade, and services sectors registered confidence indices of -30.1, -22.8 and -23.2 percent, respectively.

According to the survey, businesses were expecting the prevailing sentiment to remain up to the second quarter, although the confidence index for the next quarter was better at -6.5 percent.

Because of lingering pessimism among businessmen, the respondents said they were unlikely to hire more workers in the coming months.

Although the crisis emanated from the United States and has been affecting advanced economies at a greater degree, the Philippines is not spared from its adverse economic effects.

This is because the United States and Europe are two of the Philippines' biggest export markets and hosts to many overseas Filipino workers.

Layoffs and anemic consumer demand in advanced economies are seen to drag down the Philippines' export receipts and result in zero growth in remittances.

ASEAN human rights body lacks power to punish

AP

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Rais Yatim, from left, is greeted by Philippine's Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo as Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo and Thailand's Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya look on during an informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting at a hotel in Cha Am city near Hua Hin, Phetchaburi province, Thailand, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009. International human rights groups urged leaders of Southeast Asia gathering for their annual summit Thursday to press military-ruled Myanmar to end its rights abuses.

By JIM GOMEZ
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

CHA-AM, Thailand (AP) — Southeast Asian officials on Friday hailed the creation of a regional human rights body as a historic first step toward confronting abuses in the region, but the body will lack the power to investigate or punish violators of human rights like military-ruled Myanmar.

A confidential document obtained by The Associated Press says the rights body, which the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations hopes to form later this year, would "promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms" in the region but will abide by the bloc's bedrock policy of not interfering in members internal affairs.

The document, which outlines the proposed powers of the future rights body, falls short of key demands voiced by international human rights groups, which say the body will have limited effectiveness unless it can impose sanctions or expel countries that violate the rights of their own citizens.

The document was being presented behind closed-doors to ASEAN foreign ministers gathered at a coastal resort in Thailand ahead of an annual leaders summit this weekend. It is a first draft for the body's proposed powers, with a final draft scheduled for completion in July.

The delegates are expected to devote most of their time to grappling with how the region can best cope with the global economic crisis. Although reform in Myanmar may be discussed on the sidelines of the conference, ASEAN traditionally shies away from criticism of its members.

Thailand, which currently holds ASEAN's rotating chairmanship and is hosting the summit, bills the meeting as a turning point for the bloc.

It is the first time leaders will meet since the group signed a landmark charter in December. The document made ASEAN a legal entity and moves it a step closer toward the goal of establishing a single market by 2015 and becoming a European Union-like community.

One of the charter's key pledges is to set up the regional human rights body. It is a landmark step and a highly controversial one for the Cold War-era bloc made up of fledgling democracies, authoritarian states, a military dictatorship and a monarchy.

"It is a historic first for Southeast Asia," said Rosario Manalo, a senior diplomat representing the Philippines on the high-level panel that drafted the human rights body's outline. "It marks the efforts of the region to move toward democracy."

Officials describe the human rights body as a work in progress, saying its powers will evolve over time.

"Investigative powers should not be ruled out. We'll take it step by step," said Sihasak Phuangketkeow, Thailand's chairman of the drafting committee. "We have to go as far as we can but at the same time we have to be realistic."

ASEAN's 10 members—Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam—range from very poor to moderately rich.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR MONEY

Cash isn't king all the time

Editor's Note: This is part of a partnership between INQUIRER.net and Citibank to help readers handle their personal finances well.

Question: Thanks to all the money advice I see on TV and read about in the papers these days, I've decided to build up my savings and invest them this year. I'm conservative, though. I don't think I can participate in risky investments. Would putting my money in time deposits be good for me?—Giselle

Answer: It's good that you have decided to build up your savings and go into investments this year. We all need to take responsibility for our financial future and part of this means growing our money wisely. This can be achieved with diligent saving and with the proper investments.

Cash placed in bank deposits (whether savings, current, or time deposit accounts) is good to have since you will be assured of having a readily available fund for contingencies. In fact, everyone should have a bank account (savings account at least) which can be a good tool in putting away money for future needs and goals.

Holding large amounts of cash in the bank, however, is not a wise idea, and neither is putting all your money in bank deposits. According to the book The Citibank Guide to Building Personal Wealth, "Given the expanded investment opportunities in the region, holding very large deposits of cash is a misapplication of resources. Whether interest rates are high or low, cash does not produce a good return compared with other investments."

For instance, let's say you invested $100,000 in global equities in 1989 to prepare for your retirement. The following year, market prices go down by about 16 percent. You have three choices:

Option A: revert to cash (put all that money in bank deposits);

Option B: stay invested (keep the money there in global equities); and

Option C: invest more (add another $25,000 for instance).

In 2009, the year of your retirement, these may be the results of the action you've taken:

With Option A: If you withdrew your money in 1990 and put them in bank deposits, you would have the lowest returns among the three options.

With Option B: If you stayed invested all these 20 years, you would have more than doubled the investment.

With Option C: If you invested more, you would have almost tripled your investment.

In this illustration, you can see why cash isn't king all the time, especially when it comes to investments. Investing in bonds and equities, whether by straight direct investments or via pooled funds such as mutual funds and unit investment trust funds, may potentially earn more income without you doing anything.

This is not to say though that you should put all your money in bonds and equities. These investments carry a certain amount of risk—higher in fact, in the case of stocks or equities. You may earn, but you may also lose your capital.

And that is why allocating your investible assets should be given much thought. One should have a mix of investments for the short term (cash deposits would be good for this) and the long term (suitable for bonds and equities). You may also invest in other forms of assets such as real estate, fine art, jewelry, or a business, but again, don't put all your money in any one asset class to spread the risk of incurring losses.

Just how much should you keep in cash? The book The Citibank Guide to Building Personal Wealth tackles this question: "We all need to have some cash available at all times, but the proportion of your wealth that you should keep in cash depends on your individual circumstances and attitudes." The book suggests two ways to determine how much cash to keep in the bank:

1. Keep enough cash to pay for all your normal expenses for a given period of time, like three months to a year, and add a lump sum for emergencies.

2. Set aside a certain percentage of your total assets in cash. "If you keep more than 10 percent of your wealth in cash, it is worth taking another look to see if you really need to hold such a large sum," the same book says.

Allot the rest of your money pot according to your appetite for risk, investment goals, and time horizon for investing. If you are young and still have a lot of years to work ahead of you, consider investing more in bonds and a little in equities, especially if you are conservative like you said. Bonds give a steady rate of return over a number of years. If you are young and don't mind taking risks to potentially earn more, you may want to put more money in an equity fund rather than in a bond fund. Equities may go all the way up during a market bull run.

Just because your money is not all in cash deposits does not mean you cannot have access to it in times of emergency. Your participation (units or shares) in mutual funds or UITFs, and even your direct stock or bond investments can be converted to cash quickly. However, to maximize their earning potential, hold them for the long term as much as possible.

INQUIRER.net and Citibank invite readers to ask questions regarding financial matters. Send your questions to personal_finance@inquirer.net. Readers are solely responsible for their own investment decisions and should thus conduct their own research and due diligence and obtain professional advice. INQUIRER.net will not be liable for any loss or damage caused by a reader's reliance on information obtained from our web site.

Maharlika – PinoyStyle

Claudine to Judai: Marry him now

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Claudine Barretto gives fellow ABS-CBN star Judy Ann Santos advice about the latter's forthcoming wedding.

In this exclusive interview held at the launch of Claudine's latest product endorsement (Knorr Real Sarap), she urged Judai to tie the knot with fiancé Ryan Agoncillo, pronto. "What are you waiting for? A lot of people are excited, I'm one of them," Claudine said.

Did she think Judai was ready? "They've been planning their wedding for a long time," Claudine noted. "She'll know what to do on the day. She should savor everything—the excitement, even the tension. She'll go through different emotions, for sure."

That, Claudine said, was precisely her experience when she wed Raymart Santiago almost three years ago. "Most of all," she added, "it's important to feel the presence of God, because that's what's going to bind you forever."

She heeds this guideline to this day. "Raymart and I are partners," said Claudine. "Married life takes a lot of patience and teamwork. After giving birth to Santino, I had problems adjusting. Raymart slowed down [in his career] to spend more time with us." The trick is time management, she said. "We can both work during the week, but weekends are for the family."

Claudine Barretto

Claudine is working on a movie next month and a new TV series in July. Star Cinema is considering several scripts—including one that will reunite her with Aga Muhlach.

"I was channel surfing recently and caught my old films 'Got 2 Believe' and 'Milan.' That was when I realized how much I missed the big screen," Claudine said.

Film with 'rival'

There is also talk of a film with her screen "rival" Judai. "They've been planning that since our 'Mula sa Puso' and 'Esperanza' days, when we were teenagers," said Claudine. "One day that will push through, I just know it."

A movie with Raymart is also in the offing. "Star Cinema has been courting him for a long time na," she revealed.

In the meantime, Claudine is busy with her pet advocacies: the Eye Bank Foundation of the Philippines and orphaned and abandoned children. She is also training as a foster parent under Directors Alice Bonoan and Thelsa Biolena of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

"Social workers inspire me," said Claudine. "They are real-life heroes."

BIZ BUDDIES

Boy on Kris: Our friendship is flawed

By MARINEL CRUZ
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

KRIS AQUINO & BOY ABUNDA

Boy Abunda says he has found a sister in Kris Aquino.

"She's family. Ours is a flawed friendship in many ways, but we treat each other with utmost respect. That, I think, is the most important element of a friendship," Boy tells Living Stars. "Contrary to general perception, we do listen to each other's opinion. There is no day that we don't speak to each other. [And] whenever we get the chance, we travel together."

Boy swears traveling with Kris is "very easy." "She leaves you alone. You just meet up for lunch or supper. She's not the type who imposes her shopping schedule on anyone. On the other hand, I am guilty of always being late when it's time to meet up."

He continues: "Ours is a connection that is not easily explained, a friendship created in heaven or somewhere close. We disagree, both on the intellectual and emotional levels, especially because I do most of her contracts. The professional and personal aspects of our lives meld. We manage that."

Boy and Kris first worked together on GMA 7's "Star Talk" in 1995. They later moved to ABS-CBN to do "The Buzz." These days, they are seen weekdays on "Showbiz News Ngayon."

"We both have very strong opinions about everything, but we're both cognizant of who we are. Knowing that helps us manage this relationship," Boy says.

JODI & ANGELIKA

When she talks about how to best raise a child, says Jodi Santamaria, her best friend Angelika dela Cruz listens.

Angelika is seven months pregnant with her first child with businessman Orion Casareo. Jodi is mom to Thirdy, 3, her son with Panfilo "Pampi" Lacson Jr.

"I tell her, 'Shine (Angelika's nickname) 'wag ka magpapagod sa work.' She consults me about certain situations and follows what I say," Jodi says. "We clicked because wala siyang kiyeme. What you see is what you get."

Jodi first met Angelika in the most unlikely place—in a hospital where actor Jericho Rosales was confined. "I was there when she came to visit Echo (Jericho's nickname). This was back when we were doing 'Pangako Sa 'Yo.' (2000). We've been close since then. It's also interesting to note that we both worked with the make-up artist Varda."

Jodi adds that she's still "in touch" with John Lloyd, Kaye Abad, Patrick Garcia and Paolo Contis, her co-stars in the 1999 hit teen series "Tabing Ilog."

"It's uncommon in this business to have friendships that would last this long, like ours has," she says.

SUNSHINE, JUDAI & BETH

Sunshine Cruz says she tells buddies Beth Tamayo and Judy Ann Santos "everything," even her marital troubles.

"I trust them completely," explains the wife of actor-restaurateur Cesar Montano. "I know that, with them, I can talk freely at hindi lalabas; sa amin lang."

Sunshine and Judy Ann are both managed by Alfie Lorenzo. Shine and Beth first worked together in the 1980s teen machine, "That's Entertainment."

Beth is the godmother of Shine's daughter Samantha. Their friendship grew stronger when they took part in a series of fundraising events last year for "Ploning," which Judai produced and starred in.

"Since then we would meet every Wednesday at Regine's (Velasquez) house and chat over wine," Shine says. "Sometimes, chef Judai and chef Beth would cook something nice."

Annabelle thankful ruckus is over

MANILA, Philippines—Annabelle Rama expressed relief that the ruckus concerning her talent Heart Evangelista had been settled and said the young actress will appear in a GMA 7 soap soon.

"Nagpapasalamat ako at natapos din ang problema (I am thankful the problem has been settled)," Rama said in an interview with INQUIRER.net on Thursday during the victory party of GMA Films' "When I Met U" that starred her son Richard Gutierrez and KC Concepcion.

A statement from GMA Network said Evangelista's parents met with the broadcast firm's president and CEO Felipe Gozon on Wednesday and "apologized for mess that is happening now between Heart and the network." It was referring to Evangelista's bolting from a planned GMA 7 afternoon soap, "Muling Buksan Ang Puso," after apprehensions that her character would jeopardize her "wholesome image" as an actress.

Evangelista's decision led to a reminder from GMA Network about fulfilling terms of her talent contract regarding obligations to appear in network shows as it stressed her supposed character in "Muling Buksan ng Puso" was far from endangering her image.

"Hindi ko alam ang sasabihin ko sa pagso-sorry dahil di naman ako kasama doon (I can't say anything about the apology because I wasn't there [in the meeting])," Rama said.

She said it was Gozon's office that sought her assistance in having Evangelista's parents meet with the top network executive.

"Ang alam ko lang, tumawag ang secretary ni Atty. Gozon, gusto makipag-meeting sa parents ni Heart. Inapprove ko naman. Sabi ko makipag-usap sila (All I know is Atty. Gozon's secretary called and expressed their intention to meet with Heart's parents. I approved it. I said, let them iron things out)," she said.

Rama downplayed the issue between her talent and the network saying it was blown out of proportion.

"Yung sorry, nag-so-sorry lang siya dahil sa gulo. Simple lang naman ang nangyari. Tumanggi kami sa isang project, lumaki na lang ng lumaki. (The apology was just for the mess. What happened was simple. We turned down one project, then [the issue] got bigger and bigger)," she added. ***(INQUIRER.net)***

Robin Padilla posts P4,000 bail

By JULIE M. AURELIO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Action star Robin Padilla has posted a P4,000 bail for his provisional liberty after the Quezon City Prosecutors' Office recommended the filing of charges against him after he allegedly renovated his house without the necessary permits.

The staff of the Quezon City Metropolitan Trial Court Branch 42 said the actor appeared before the court on Tuesday to post bail.

The charges of violating Presidential Decree 1096, or the National Building Code, was recommended filed by assistant city prosecutor Robert Tobia based on the complaint of barangay chair Jose Arnel Quebal.

Quebal claimed Padilla built an extension for his two-story house in Barangay West Fairview in 2005 without the required permits.

A Quezon City building official sent a notice of violation to Padilla, directing him to stop all illegal building activities in his premises and to coordinate with the office of the building official.

HOME BODY

Sam likes it clean

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Singer-actor Sam Milby admits he can be "obsessive-compulsive" especially when it comes to his new home.

"I'm a perfectionist," he concedes. "Before leaving the house, I make sure that the air-conditioner is turned off. That all the doors are closed. That everything is in place."

In the middle of the shoot, Sam takes a break to give detailed instructions to the helper cleaning the swimming pool.

"Actually," he admits, "I'd rather do things myself."

That would be the American in him.

Even when it comes to decorating the house, he takes a hands-on approach.

Although he hired a pro, contractor-designer Tess Medina, Sam freely shared his input.

"It was my idea to build 'hanging' stairs," he relates. "I also suggested the rotating TV wall, so I could watch both either in the living room or in the dining area."

Clean and clutter-free, modern and minimalist, the home reflects his no-fuss personality. "I don't like clutter," he confesses. "I wanted the ground floor to be open, to not have walls … to be clean and all-white. It makes the house look bigger than it actually is."

This two-story home on a 386 square-meter property, is three times bigger than his first house in the same Pasig subdivision.

According to manager Eric Raymundo, Sam looks at real estate as a possible business away from show biz.

"In three years, I plan to sell this house and find a bigger place in the South, somewhere near Laguna and Tagaytay," Sam says. "For work, I'll get a condo unit in the city, but I'll spend my free time in the country."

His US-based mom saw his new home during her last holiday visit. "She loves it. She says she's proud of me," Sam recounts.

He never imagined he'd get this far in the biz when he was booted from the "Pinoy Big Brother" house three years ago. "I thought I'd go back to my old life, to more go-sees for TV commercials."

Instead, he's a top draw who has built his own home.

He concerned himself even with the minutest details, personally picking the kitchen appliances and the dinnerware. "I go for unique stuff," he explains.

Speaking of which, talk turns to his bedroom. He asks, rhetorically: "Who'd think of building a bedroom with two levels?"

Sam's room features a loft where there's a semi-circular bed. On the first level is a computer workstation and an entertainment center.

But the TV nook, which boasts over 200 movie titles, is modest compared to Sam's mini-theater—his favorite spot.

Maharlika – Opinyon

Discovering nationalism

You know this government is in deep organic fertilizer because of one telltale sign: It has discovered nationalism.

Ferdinand Marcos made the same startling discovery when his patrons in Washington began abandoning him after his minions shot Ninoy Aquino to death on the tarmac. And after his enemies grew to a multitude overnight, their cries finally piercing through deaf heaven and even deafer Washington, whichever was the more powerful or the more loudly implored.

Overnight, the Marcos regime turned country-fearing, making threatening noises against the US bases, the KKK, a livelihood project, even trying to imitate the original KKK with some of its officials making blood compacts by torchlight in support of the Philippine Ideology. That Ideology, manufactured still overnight, made Marcos the apotheosis of an unfolding of Philippine history as reeled off by the heroes. In one twist of real history, the young military officers who became its captive audience took the nationalism to heart and decided to free the nation from captivity under him.

That is the context with which to view GMA's allies loudly vociferating against the World Bank and the VFA. They're all over the place, Miriam and Johnny and Joker suddenly discovering that the World Bank is an oppressive institution and the VFA an exceptionally onerous exaction on their beloved country.

At the very least, what's curious about it is that until the World Bank implicated Mike Arroyo in a plot to defraud the World Bank, they never threw a stone in its direction. Indeed, one moment Miriam and friends were looking hard at the charge sheet against the First Gentleman, the next they were hard at work prosecuting Daniel Smith. Funny how crime and punishment works in this country. At the very most, they forget it was Miriam who, claiming to be a constitutional expert, argued that Erap, then her lord and master, and not the Senate, had every right to sign the VFA because it was not a treaty but a mere agreement. Since then everyone has referred to it as a treaty, a thing Miriam has never bothered to "correct."

There's The Rub

By CONRADO DE QUIROS

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Of course the VFA ought to be scrapped. Of course the VFA ought never to have been signed in the first place, voiding as it did the heroic struggle to terminate the US bases, and proving as it has that a base by any other name reeks as foully. And of course the World Bank, as much as the International Monetary Fund, should be pilloried for foisting a "structural adjustment program" and GATT's version of globalization on us, both of which put us directly in the path of the super storms of the global market, which razed down our agriculture and industry. Of course it's justice, however Stone Age, to throw Daniel Smith in Muntinlupa and turn a blind eye to whatever it is the inmates there do unto foreigners, young or old, as they do unto Filipino women.

But GMA and her boys and girl have about as much authority to damn them as Mike Arroyo has to damn Jesus Christ's two companions on the Cross.

Only recently GMA was desperately chasing Barack Obama he had to hide under his bed while she was in the US (and probably long after) for fear of her suddenly materializing by his side, slipping through US security which Al Zeidi proved isn't particularly ironclad. You wonder why Malacañang doesn't just resort to Photoshop and put GMA side by side with her long-hunted prey, waving to the world.

Indeed, not too long ago GMA was just loudly proclaiming the Philippines' role as America's junior partner in Asia, and her own one as Chief Little Brown Sister. That was when George W. Bush unveiled his plan to rape the world, notably the Arab one which greatly minded the proposed intrusion into their behind. Bush, who stole the vote in Florida, said, "You are either with me or against me." GMA, who benefited from People Power and reviled it afterward and who later stole the vote in the Comelec, said the same thing. Kindred spirit, kindred gall. And very probably kindred fate, Bush very probably getting away with the lighter sentence.

The pseudo-nationalism or fake patriotism never really helped Marcos. At the end of the day, the quintessential Amboy, as James Hamilton Patterson called him, fled to—where else?—the USA. Of course some say he agreed to board the plane only because he heard "Paoay" instead of "Hawaii" when he asked after its destination, but that belongs more properly to text joke than to history.

Alas, there's nothing roughly sounding like Lubao in America. In any case, there's no welcome mat awaiting GMA there anyway, not even in Citizen Dubya's door. And still in any case, Marcos himself found no peace in the US, finding only no end of legal summons choking up his letterbox.

The last days of Marcos and GMA have one dazzling thing in common. That is democracy pushing out of the loins of tyranny across the world. The US was not its midwife during Marcos' time, it was its abortionist. Reagan was supportive of Third World gangsters. But the same Third World was afire with struggles against dictatorship, as indeed was the socialist world, no small thanks to glasnost, which would bring down the Berlin Wall in 1989. Today, the US is democracy's potential midwife, with Obama assuming that role, birthing democracy once more from the loins of (homegrown) tyranny. Already the expectations of a new world are rippling across the world like a tsunami. Those who cling to power through corruption and deceit—or plots to mount iron-fisted rule—must truly find themselves on the wrong side of history, where echoes only the death knell across desolate space. History has never treated its wrong side kindly.

Feigned patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels. Fake nationalism presages their downfall.

EDITORIAL

The ghost of Edsa

We didn't think it was possible, but the administration that sought to minimize the role of the first Edsa People Power revolution in our history and then belatedly tried to contain the public relations damage by announcing a commemorative holiday for students managed to deepen the insult with an outrageous offense on Sunday.

Speaking at the wreath-laying ceremony to mark the start of the 23rd anniversary of the political phenomenon known as Edsa I, President Macapagal-Arroyo celebrated that particular turning point in history by warning that "the world" would not tolerate a third People Power uprising.

"The world embraced Edsa 1 in 1986. The world tolerated Edsa 2 in 2001. The world will not forgive an Edsa 3 but will instead condemn the Philippines as a country whose political system is unstable," the principal beneficiary of Edsa 2 intoned.

What she means is that she will not forgive an Edsa 3, because it would come at her expense.

Stripped of ceremonial rhetoric, the President's offensive and ungenerous statement gives expression to the pervasive fear that afflicts her administration: It is haunted by its continuing crisis of legitimacy.

The true glory of both Edsa 1, which we remember this week, and Edsa 2, which we were encouraged to forget last month, is that they were the right thing to do. An "Edsa," in other words, is not merely the people-powered ouster of a government; it is the people-powered ouster of a fraudulent, illegitimate or deeply corrupt government.

If a third Edsa happens, it will be because the Filipino people have had enough of a wicked government, and because the normal processes that enable the public to keep the essential promise of democracy—for the citizens to choose their leaders, and to kick them out for cause—have been closed off or co-opted. If a third Edsa happens, "the world" may or may not celebrate. But we are certain of one thing: Only public officials in authoritarian societies or in compromised democracies will find reason to fear it.

Which brings us back to the Arroyo administration's deliberate undermining of the Edsa legacy.

Take a look at Proclamation 1728, issued on Feb. 19, 2009, or less than a week ago. The new proclamation belatedly declared Feb. 23 "as a special holiday for all private and public schools at all levels throughout the country." The Palace does not want the people to pay anything more than a cursory nod to the Edsa 1 anniversary—they may, you know, get crazy ideas.

This is a policy stance that reflects, not the public's thoughts, but the administration's thinking. The public knows that "the world" will condemn governments which, given evidence of collusion between private contractors and public officials engaged in internationally funded projects, choose to criticize the evidence-gatherer instead. But the Arroyo administration does not see this reality, or chooses not to. Instead, it condemns the very possibility of another Edsa uprising as an index of instability. Easy enough to understand, of course: A fear-ridden government is spooked by its own shadow.

© Philippine Daily Inquirer

'Adobo' in many forms

Food is the last thing that should be on my mind on Ash Wednesday, but I can't help it. Why must meat taste exceptionally good on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday? Obviously, when you abstain from meat on these days, when you fast and take only one full meal for the day, any type of meat (or food) becomes better. Absence does make the heart and the taste buds grow fonder. But I shouldn't complain. Muslims have their Ramadan, which is longer and more difficult than Catholic fasting and abstinence.

Looking Back

By AMBETH OCAMPO

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Food also came to mind early in the week because I found the Anthony Bourdain "No Reservations" episode on the Philippines on YouTube, and I was glad that this eating show has finally made a stop in the Philippines after covering the rest of Southeast Asia. Our country and its food didn't seem attractive enough for Bourdain and his producers, and we are lucky that a Filipino-American from New Jersey, with roots in Cebu, won a contest that got Bourdain here.

The interviews in Luzon with Ivan Man Dy, who took him to Dampa, and Claude Tayag, who took him to the goat and "sisig" place in Angeles City as well as the barbecue chicken place everyone knows as "Double Dead," gave him a real taste of street food and ordinary fare. The dinner at Tayag's by-appointment-only restaurant, Bale dutung (Wood house), in Angeles gave him the gastronomic fusion highlights of Kapampangan cuisine that every Filipino agrees is the best in the country, although I would think that Bacolod and Iloilo, which also grew rich in the 19th century from sugar, give Pampanga some competition.

A problem comes up when we are asked to define our food. We are a mix of so many cultures that we can get quite confused gastronomically. Ivan Dy said the "national dish" is adobo. I used to think the same way too, until the late Doreen Fernandez suggested that it was something else in that landmark essay, "Why Sinigang?"

Come to think of it, we only have two "national" things established by law: sampaguita as the national flower and narra as the national tree. Everything else, I think, was invented by National Bookstore in those gaudy postcards and teaching aids they have been selling since I was a boy. What is the national animal? Is it the tamaraw or is it the monkey-eating eagle whose indigenous name we have all but forgotten? What is the national fish? Is it "bangus" [milkfish] or that smallest fish in the world from Bicol?

"Adobo" is a way of stewing with vinegar. It was used by the Spaniards to describe the food they encountered on the islands. What did we call "adobo" before they arrived? That is lost to history.

One of the challenges in writing a history of Philippine food is the documentation. Ask any Filipino for his/her "adobo" recipe and we will have as many kinds of "adobo" from different places and palates. Charles de Gaulle is supposed to have said that it was difficult to rule France, a country with so many types of cheese. Wait till they see how many kinds of "adobo" we have.

There are stray descriptions of food in travel accounts, from Pigafetta's in the 16th century to current international travel guides like Fodor's or Lonely Planet. Doreen Fernandez went into the 55-volume Blair and Robertson and the early Spanish dictionaries to find the base from which our cuisine springs, but the task is far from complete.

Sometimes we are lucky, as in the case of "Recuerdos de Filipinas," an album of photographs by Felix Laureano published in Barcelona in the late 19th century and recently translated from the original Spanish by Felice Noelle Rodriguez and Renan S. Prado, with all the photos enhanced and wonderfully reproduced by Rayvi Sunico of Cacho Hermanos. Laureano took pictures of Iloilo, and one of the things that caught my attention was a "calenderia," a makeshift structure, a lean-to with coconut fronds, raised from the ground that sold street food. The "calenderia," even if poor and miserable on its exterior, has everything inside. There, food and drinks are served to passing travelers. It has everything, from light tobacco, cigarettes, tobacco in leaf, for chewing "buyo," "bonga," "mascada," "apug," to white "morisqueta," "puso," "inun-on," "sinig-ang," "lina-ga," "pakcio," "guinamus," "uga," "tinola," "inihao na manuc," to frothy "tuba," "nipa" liquor, "vino sa lubi," beer and soda water.

Aside from the dishes mentioned, there are "tapa sang usa," "sang vaca," "isda nga minanticaan," "adobo" and "escabeche" done in the style and taste of the country. For desserts and delicacies, there are: "saging," "pina," "atis," "chicos," "limoncillos," "alfajor," "ticoy," "poto," "cuacoy," "calamay-hati," etc.

Then he describes "kari":

"A common dish of the Europeans when they find themselves in the Far East. The 'kari' is made of chicken or of prawns. The chicken is cut up into pieces and fried in a pan with lard. When it turns half golden, one jar of coconut milk is poured into the pan and, as it boils, 'kari' powder is added. The powder is extracted from various aromatic and spicy herbs. One cooks the 'kari' sauce the same way with prawns as with the chicken. This dish is eaten mixed with a good plate of 'morisqueta' [rice]."

Is this curry or "kare-kare"? If only we had more detailed historical sources on Philippine cuisine, it would help us to define not only what is Filipino food — but also what it is to be Filipino.

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu.

Maharlika – Samu't Sari

TAX SEMINAR

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The Marianas Institute of Filipino CPAs and Accountants conducted a tax seminar on tax savings tips for 2008 and recent tax law updates last Saturday, Feb. 21. It was held at the Saipan Grand Hotel's Seaside Hall and Edgar T. Aguilar, manager for Tax Services of Deloitte & Touche LLP, served as the resource person of the seminar. A total of 126 took part in the seminar.

BIRTHDAY SHOUTOUT

Belated happy birthday to Mang Johnny R. Reyes, seated right, who celebrated his special day last Saturday, Feb. 21, 2009, at his residence in Kannat Tabla, Saipan. Greetings coming from the Sto. Nino Group Saipan. From left, Manang, Minda, Suzette, Mang Johnny, Vicky, and Rosie.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Mang Johnny with his wife Rosie.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

YoungStyle

Is it safe to eat? Sometime laws can't protect us

By VALERIE STRAUSS
(C) 2009, THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON—You might have heard about people across the United States and Canada who got sick from eating some food products made with peanuts.

Government officials believe they have figured out why it happened and are taking steps to prevent more people from eating the contaminated food.

What they learned is that products made with peanuts from a company called Peanut Corporation of America were contaminated with bacteria called salmonella. More than 635 people got sick, and at least nine died.

Before you get worried about eating a peanut butter sandwich, you should know that major brands of jarred peanut butter found in grocery stores, such as Jif and Peter Pan, are not involved. They are safe to eat.

In fact, one reason this story about food being contaminated has become such big news is that it is rare. Most of the food Americans eat is perfectly safe—and we eat a lot! In the United States, people spend about $1 trillion a year on food, and 16.5 million people work in the food industry.

Laws require safe handling of food, and a number of U.S. and state government agencies inspect the food as it is processed.

"People are very aware today about keeping food safe," said Diane Van, director of the Agriculture Department's food safety hotline. "Twenty years ago they didn't know about salmonella. Today they do."

In the current case, government officials say the peanut company in question allowed illegal and unhealthy conditions that led to salmonella poisoning.

Salmonella is a group of bacteria identified in the laboratory of American scientist Daniel Salmon. It causes diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps, which usually last four to seven days. But rarely, it can cause serious illness and death.

That's why officials have ordered a recall of some 2,000 products that might be contaminated. It is one of the largest product recalls in history. Some of the recalled products are peanut butter crackers, snack cakes and granola bars.

The job of food inspectors has become more difficult in recent years. As the amount of food that needs to be inspected has gone up, the number of inspectors has declined.

The Food and Drug Administration, responsible for the safety of most U.S. food, has cut inspections by about 80 percent since the early 1970s. Why? Decreases in the budget are a big reason.

Another factor is that about 15 percent of the food Americans eat comes from other countries. That means the United States can't control how it is grown or processed. And the percentage is doubling about every 10 years.

All of this means that you can play an important role in making sure you eat safe food. Learn about food safety. And the next time you think about eating unwashed fruit, or eating something you dropped on the floor, think again.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Is it safe to eat? Yes, to peanut butter (major brands were not part of the recent safety concern) and grapes (but wash them first). Maybe, to peanut butter crackers; those made with Peanut Corporation of America peanuts were recalled because of contamination.

FDA U.S. Food and Drug Administration
FDA Home Page | Search FDA Site | FDA A-Z Index | Contact FDA
FOOD SAFETY
QUIZ for KIDS
2. Eating raw cookie dough made with raw eggs is OK.
TRUE FALSE
FDA Kids' Home Page
FDA Home Page | Search FDA Site | FDA A-Z Index | Contact FDA | Privacy | Accessibility
FDA/Website Management Staff

THE WASHINGTON POST

The Food and Drug Administration has a special Web site (top) that includes a section for kids of different ages and has quizzes and games. Below, you can interact with the Food Detectives in English and Spanish at www.fooddetectives.com.

FOOD SAFETY FACT

If you left out a piece of pizza for more than two hours and want to eat it—don't! Bacteria spreads fastest at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees.

The Washington Post

The 'Five-Second Rule' myth

(c) 2009, The Washington Post

Pretend that you are about to eat a delicious cookie, and it suddenly drops onto the kitchen floor.

Is it safe to eat?

Some people would tell you to go ahead and enjoy it if it hasn't been on the floor for more than five seconds. According to this so-called rule, food that comes in contact with a dirty floor for five seconds or less doesn't have time to pick up enough bacteria to make you sick.

Well, experts say the rule is a myth. Don't eat the food.

Studies by scientists have shown that the longer food stays on a dirty surface, the more unsanitary it can get. But in even as little as five seconds, food can pick up enough bacteria to make you sick.

For example, researchers at Clemson University in South Carolina showed that bologna and bread left for five seconds on a surface that had been contaminated with salmonella collected between 150 and 8,000 bacteria. Just a handful of the bacteria can make you sick.

The surface your food falls on might not always be dirty, but you can't be sure.

So to be safe, go get a fresh cookie.

Some things you can do to keep your food safe

(c) 2009, The Washington Post

- Wash and dry your hands before you make or eat a snack or meal.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in warm water before you eat them. Don't use soap, but dry them off with paper towels. (Then throw the paper towels away!)
- Put milk, yogurt, mayonnaise, luncheon meat and eggs back in the refrigerator right away. (That's because foods that are meant to be refrigerated can spoil when left out at room temperature. Eating spoiled food can make you sick, too.)
- Put backpacks on the floor, not the counter. (You don't want dirt from your backpack on a counter where food is being prepared.)
- Keep pets away from kitchen counters and tables.
- Pack lunch with ice for cold foods and a thermos for hot foods.
- Don't let raw foods touch ready-to-eat or cooked foods.

Find out more

(c) 2009, The Washington Post

If you want to know more about food safety, a number of helpful Web sites offer information, quizzes and games. (Always ask a grown-up before going online.)

- A great interactive site can be found at www.fda.gov/OC/OPACOM/KIDS. This site from the Food and Drug Administration includes an "inspect the warehouse" game that will let you learn about the kinds of things that can contaminate food.
- Go to www.foodsafety.gov and click on "Kids, Teens, and Educators." This is a Food and Drug Administration site that includes a section for kids of different ages.
- Check out www.fooddetectives.com to play a game and learn more ways to keep food safe.

true or false: no two snowflakes are alike

By VALERIE STRAUSS
(C) 2009, THE WASHINGTON POST

You've probably heard it before: Every snowflake that falls from the sky is different in some way from every other one—or from any other flake that has EVER fallen.

Considering how many snowflakes actually fall, that seems incredible. But snow experts say it really is true.

Let's start with the basics.

Snowflakes are made up of ice, but they are not frozen raindrops. (That's sleet, which is water that freezes as it falls.)

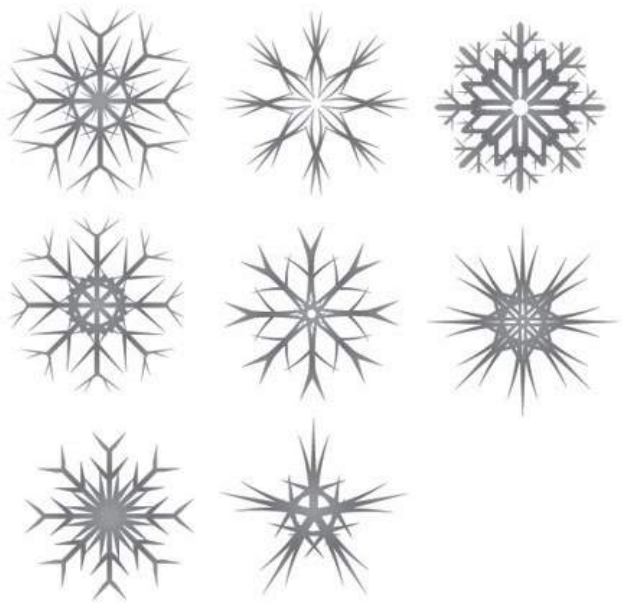
Instead, snowflakes are created inside clouds when a tiny droplet of cloud—which is water vapor—freezes into what is called an ice crystal. These crystals are mostly simple hexagons, or six-sided shapes.

But as more water vapor condenses, more crystals stick together and the six sides can grow. "Branches" or "arms" sprout on each of the sides.

Shapes are partly determined by the temperature and humidity in the air in which the snowflake is created. As the flakes fall, collisions and partial melting can create other shapes—or take away a shape.

From those complex snowflakes comes the notion that no two are the same.

Here is one way of looking at the mathematical possibilities of that, according to Kenneth Libbrecht, a snowflake expert (what a great job that must be!) and physics professor at the California Institute of Technology.



Let's say you have 15 books on a shelf. If you had the time to arrange them in as many different possible ways as existed, you would find that there are more than 1 trillion combinations! Just for 15 books.

If you have 100 books to play with, the number of possible ways you could put them on the shelf would go up to this number: a "1" followed by 158 zeroes.

So experts say that it is virtually impossible for two complex snowflakes with many molecules to be identical. They may look that way to you if you can get a good enough look, but they aren't.

The first person believed to get a good look at snowflakes—and argue that no complex flakes are alike—was Wilson Bentley, a Vermont farmer turned photographer.

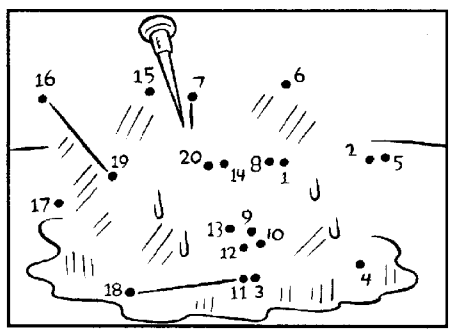
In the late 1800s, he found a way to photograph snowflakes using a microscope. He took pictures of more than 5,000 flakes, and none were alike. He became so famous that he became known as "The Snowflake Man."

Go to Libbrecht's Web site at www.its.caltech.edu/(tilde)atomic/snowcrystals. He will tell you all you ever wanted to know about snowflakes—and much more!

SNOWFLAKE FACT

Scientist Robert Hooke revealed the complexity of snowflakes for the first time in a book he published in 1665. It contained sketches of many snow crystals.

The Washington Post



IF A BISCUIT is a soda cracker, what is an ice pick? Connect the dots and find out.

Answer: It's a water cracker.

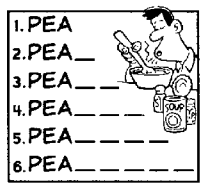
Illustrated by David Coulson

A "WINTER GOLF" PROBLEM! See if you can substitute the digits 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 for the letters on our pad so you will have a correct addition problem. The same digit is used for the same letter.

Answer: C=2, L=6, U=5, B=7, T=4, E=1, G=3, O+0, F=8. (2657 + 411 = 3068).

A "PEA"CULIAR PUZZLE! In this puzzle the words get progressively longer and they all begin with PEA. The following hints should help:

1. Pea (in place).
2. A delicious fruit.
3. Found in the sea.
4. Comes already wrapped.
5. Loud burst of noise.
6. Feeling much better.



Answers: 1. Pea. 2. Pear. 3. Pearl. 4. Peanut. 5. Pealing. 6. Peachier.

Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend

1.	E							L
2.		E					L	
3.			E			L		
4.				E	L			
5.				L	E			
6.			L			E		
7.		L					E	
8.	L							E

FIND THE BIG WORDS!

Using the definitions and the anagrams below, find the eight eight-letter words that fit into the framework on the left. For each definition, the letters in the two anagram words must be unscrambled and used to form the word asked for:

DEFINITION:	ANAGRAM:
1. Momentous	fuel + vent
2. To confuse or perplex.	feud + bled
3. Farming apparel.	save + roll
4. Paper container.	pole + even
5. Game of chance.	lute + tore
6. Animal enclosures.	puns + bell
7. Foundation of language.	peal + bath
8. To cover on both sides.	mail + tale

Answers: 1. Eventful. 2. Befuddle. 3. Overalls. 4. Envelope. 5. Roulette. 6. Bullpens. 7. Alphabet. 8. Laminate.

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Old-time remedy for ear infection

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I read your column about the Shih Tzu and its problem with ear infections, and wanted to pass on something I learned many years ago from an old-time eye, ear, nose and throat specialist. This also works for children who are prone to swimmer's ear.

I had two hunting breed dogs with long ears, and we lived right on the shores of Lake Michigan, so they were constantly having ear problems. What the doctor told me is as follows: Have the patient lie with the bad ear up. Using a plastic eyedropper filled with hydrogen peroxide (dilute peroxide with water before use), gently squirt the contents into the ear. Allow this to bubble for at least a minute. Thoroughly dry the ear, and use Q-tips carefully to clean out the debris. After the ear is as dry as possible, tap Desenex powder down into the ear with the patient lying on his or her side again so the powder gets down into the ear. This may have to be done every other day for a week, but it worked for me—both with my dogs and my children. I hope this treatment helps "Sandy."—Bernie W. in Ormond Beach, Fla.

DEAR BERNIE: This type of treatment is available (for humans) in a kit at drugstores featuring a diluted solution of hydrogen peroxide. I would exercise caution in using this treatment with small dogs, however.

I also strongly recommend that owners whose pets are experiencing an ear infection, either for the first time or recurring, go to their veterinarian first to have the ears examined. The vet should test for evidence of ear mites, a yeast infection or other cause. Ear mites can be quickly treated, but recurring ear infections can be trickier—topical medicines often only treat the symptoms, and the cause, such as allergies, can take more time and effort to diagnose.

■ ■ ■

Send your tips, questions and comments to Paw's Corner, c/o King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475, or e-mail them to pawscorner@hotmail.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Samantha Weaver

■ According to the Crayola Company, you can eat 3,500 of its crayons a day and still not reach the level of toxicity found in an ordinary glass of drinking water. The company didn't mention how—or why—anyone would consume that many crayons in a lifetime, let alone a single day.

■ It was 19th-century British author Elizabeth Charles who made the following observation: "To know how to say what others only know how to think is what makes men poets or sages; and to dare to say what others only dare to think makes men martyrs or reformers—or both."

■ Good news for junk-food lovers: Beginning in 1996, the United States Department of Agriculture started putting frozen French fries in the "fresh vegetables" category.

■ Back in 1935, the owner of the Chicago Cubs baseball team predicted that night games were "just a fad." He wasn't much of a prognosticator, it seems.

■ Some people claim that rubbing the nose of any statue of Abraham Lincoln is good luck. It's not really known why, though; some speculate that it's because Lincoln's children used to pull on his nose for luck. However, only one of his four children survived to adulthood, so it's questionable whether his nose was ever lucky for anyone.

■ The ubiquitous summertime flip-flop sandals are known in Australia as "pluggers," are called "slops" in South Africa and "slippers" in Hawaii, and New Zealanders call them "jandals."

■ It's been reported that on the morning of Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, an American psychic named Jean Dixon predicted, "Something dreadful is going to happen to the president today." At 12:30 p.m. that day in Dallas, President Kennedy was assassinated.

■ ■ ■

Thought for the Day: "The prime purpose of eloquence is to keep other people from talking."—Louis Vermeil

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MAGIC MAZE — BAY : PLACES

B N K I F C Z W U R P C G M J
H E C Z X U A S Q N S R L J G
E C Z X V T R P P N A U L M J
H E E C A Y W S M N I Z O V T
R P N N L K I N D A N N D R G
E C B Z R R E X W R T R E W U
S R S H E E P S H E A D P A O
M L N O R T H A G L N H J L I
G E D G B S A O L U N Y C V X
W U T S Q Y P A H M S O N I L
K J H G F O M T S E W D C S R

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

Cruz	Montego	Richards	Thunder
Grand	North	Saint Ann's	Walvis
Herne	Oyster	Sheepshead	West
Mallard	Palm	Tampa	

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GO FIGURE! by Linda Thistle

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

DIFFICULTY: ★★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult
★★★ GO FIGURE!

	÷		+		11
x		x		÷	
	+		x		13
÷		+		+	
	+		+		17
18		13		17	

1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9 9

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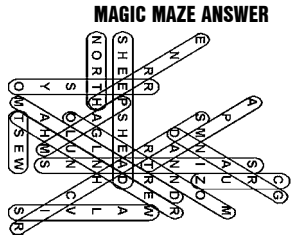
MAGIC MAZE ANSWER



GO FIGURE ANSWER

	17		13		18
17	9	+	5	+	3
	+		+		÷
13	1	x	4	+	9
	÷		x		x
11	8	+	2	÷	6

Shape easy-to-make modeling dough

Sometimes I think about all the money I've spent on toys through the years. Has this ever happened to you? You go out and buy the latest, greatest, "as-seen-on-TV," must-have toy for your child's birthday, and when he finally unwraps the present, he has more fun playing with the packaging than with the toy. This proves that "more bucks" doesn't necessarily mean "more bang."

Here's a thrifty idea that gives you and your kids or grandkids a lot of "bang," and it costs less than a buck. All you need is salt, water and flour—and you can whip up a batch of moldable dough for hours of creative play.

Mix together 2 1/2 cups of all-purpose flour, 1 cup salt and 1 cup water in a medium-size bowl. Knead several times on a floured board or countertop. If the dough is too dry, just add a little more water. If it's too sticky, just put in a little more flour. Now you are ready to shape and bake the dough. Here are two ideas to get you started:

MAKE JEWELRY AND REFRIGERATOR MAGNETS

Roll out the dough with a rolling pin to 1/2-inch thickness. Dip cookie cutters in flour and cut out shapes. Carve patterns and designs on the dough with a dull knife, if you wish. For necklaces, make a hole through the top of each shape with a toothpick.

MAKE WHIMSICAL SCULPTURES

Instead of rolling out the dough, play with some of the clay in your hands and shape it into a small animal or an object such as a truck.

Bake the cutouts or small sculptures on a tray in a 250 F oven for about

1 1/2 hours, or until dough is hard to the touch. Cool completely. Paint with acrylic paints and let dry. For extra shine, coat with white household glue.

Thread the cutout pieces on a ribbon or cord for a necklace, or glue pin clasps to the backsides for cool jewelry. Glue on a magnet for refrigerator art.

■ ■ ■

Donna Erickson's award-winning television series "Donna's Day" airs on public television nationwide. Visit www.donnasday.com to find out when it airs on your local PBS station and to sign up for Donna's e-newsletter.

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Life & Style

Nick nixed: 'Idol' chooses 3 more finalists

This photo released by Fox shows Nicholas Mitchell performing in front of the Judges on American Idol on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2009 in Los Angeles.

AP

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Nick Mitchell probably won't be having the last laugh on "American Idol."

The outrageous 27-year-old sketch comedian, who performed as his over-the-top alter ego Norman Gentle, was one of nine semifinalists sent packing Thursday on the popular Fox singing competition. "I'm looking for employment—always," Mitchell of Brookfield, Conn., told host Ryan Seacrest before his dismissal.

The second group of the eighth season's finalists not headed to the unemployment line are Allison Iraheta, a 16-year-old high school student from Los Angeles; Kris Allen, a 23-year-old University of Central Arkansas student from Conway, Ark.; and Adam Lambert, a 26-year-old theater actor from Los Angeles. The trio received the most viewer votes.

"I thought Nick was hilarious, so I didn't know what was gonna happen," said Lambert.

While the show's four judges were more than satisfied with Lambert's elastic take on the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction," they had a mixed reaction to fellow finalist Allen's performance of Michael Jackson "Man in the Mirror."

The panel was also impressed with red-haired Iraheta's red-hot rendition of Heart's "Alone."

"You just blew it out the box!" Randy Jackson exclaimed after Iraheta performed Wednesday.

The three finalists will join 28-year-old church music director Danny Gokey from Milwaukee, 21-year-old musician Alexis Grace from Memphis, Tenn., and 27-year-old oil rig worker Michael Sarver from Jasper, Texas, who were selected as the first three finalists last week.

Next Tuesday, 12 more semifinalists will vie for three spots in the competition's top 12.

Mitchell—and other dismissed semifinalists—may get another shot. After the first nine finalists are selected by viewer votes, the judges will pick the last three finalists following a special wild card round.

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Love Me Again

Friday		4:25	7:20	9:50
Saturday	1:30	4:25	7:20	9:50
Sunday	1:30	4:25	7:20	
Mon and Tues		4:25	7:20	

Piolo Pascual, Angel Locsin
Love, Romance, Drama • Rated PG

Synopsis
Arah (Angel Locsin) dreams of a better life—different from the life she knows in Bukidnon. Ranches everywhere are closing one by one. The glory her hometown once knew was slowly disappearing in favour of life abroad, particularly in Australia. Arah believes this too. Australia will save them from poverty. But Migo (Piolo Pascual) does not share this belief. He believes that Bukidnon's glory will return if only people didn't leave. Migo is Arah's first love.

★ ★ ★

The Uninvited

Friday		4:05	7:25	9:35
Saturday	1:20	4:05	7:25	9:35
Sunday	1:20	4:05	7:25	
Mon and Tues		4:05	7:25	

Elizabeth Banks, David Strathairn
Horror, Remake • Rated PG 13

Synopsis
A deadly battle of wills begins when Anna returns from a psychiatric facility and investigates the circumstances surrounding her mother's suspicious and untimely death. While Anna recuperates from the tragedy, her father becomes engaged to Rachel, her mother's former nurse, and moves her into their home. Anna's dismay quickly turns to horror when she is visited by her mother's ghost—crying out for revenge and pointing an accusing finger at Rachel.

Defiance

Friday		4:00	7:00	9:45
Saturday	1:00	4:00	7:00	9:45
Sunday	1:00	4:00	7:00	
Mon and Tues		4:00	7:00	

Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber
Action, Drama, War • Rated R

Synopsis
The year is 1941 and the Jews of Eastern Europe are being massacred by the thousands. Managing to escape certain death, three brothers take refuge in the dense surrounding woods they have known since childhood. There they begin their desperate battle against the Nazis. At first it is all they can do to stay alive. But gradually, as whispers of their daring spreads, they begin to attract others—men and women, young and old—willing to risk everything for the sake of even a moment's freedom.

Friday The 13th

Friday		4:20	7:05	10:00
Saturday	1:05	4:20	7:05	10:00
Sunday	1:05	4:20	7:05	
Mon and Tues		4:20	7:05	

Jared Padalecki, Amanda Righetti
Horror, Remake • Rated R

Push

Friday		4:15	7:30	9:40
Saturday	1:10	4:15	7:30	9:40
Sunday	1:10	4:15	7:30	
Mon and Tues		4:15	7:30	

Chris Evans, Dakota Fanning
Thriller Supernatural • Rated PG 13

Pink Panther 2

Friday		4:10	7:10	9:30
Saturday	1:15	4:10	7:10	9:30
Sunday	1:15	4:10	7:10	
Mon and Tues		4:10	7:10	

Steve Martin, Andy Garcia
Comedy, Mystery • Rated PG

Taken

Friday		4:30	7:15	9:55
Saturday	1:25	4:30	7:15	9:55
Sunday	1:25	4:30	7:15	
Mon and Tues		4:30	7:15	

Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace
Action, Drama, Thriller • Rated PG 13

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No agreement reached at Piven grievance hearing

NEW YORK (AP)—No agreement has been reached in the Jeremy Piven grievance hearing.

Piven appeared Thursday at the session requested by the producers of "Speed-the-Plow," which the performer abruptly quit in December after his doctor said he was suffering from mercury poisoning.

But after hearing from both parties, a panel composed of Actors' Equity and Broadway League representatives were unable to reach the necessary unanimous decision. A joint statement issued by the union and the Broadway producers' trade association said "the producers have the right, as a next step, to proceed to arbitration."

The producers could not immediately be reached for comment.

Piven's spokeswoman, Samantha Mast, issued a statement saying: "Mr. Piven is hopeful that the producers will ultimately recognize that he did the right thing by listening to the instructions from his doctors ... who told him to stop the play immediately and undergo enforced rest, rather than continuing to perform and risk dire health consequences."

Pavin

The 43-year-old Piven, the Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning star of HBO's "Entourage," departed the production of David Mamet's satiric comedy after his physician said he had high levels of mercury in his body, possibly from eating too much sushi.

"Speed-the-Plow" opened last October to generally enthusiastic notices and by the time the revival ended its limited engagement Feb. 22 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, it had recouped its $2.26 million production costs.

Three different actors—understudy Jordan Lage, Norbert Leo Butz and William H. Macy—followed Piven in the role of movie mogul Bobby Gould. Mamet's three-character play about Hollywood glamour, sex and power, also starred Elisabeth Moss of AMC's "Mad Men" and Raul Esparza.

Seinfeld bringing reality series to NBC

NEW YORK (AP)—Jerry Seinfeld is returning to NBC as producer of a comic reality series where celebrities and a referee try to help squabbling couples make peace.

That's the good news for Seinfeld's fans.

The bad news? Seinfeld said he has no plans to step in front of the cameras for "The Marriage Ref" or, for that matter, to ever star in a television series again.

Seinfeld

"It's a young man's game," said Seinfeld, 54. "Nothing could surpass the experience I had."

That would be "Seinfeld," of course, the sitcom that ended its nine-year run in 1998, a big part of NBC's golden era. The fourth-place network has since fallen on hard times, and jumped at the chance to welcome back one of its top names.

The idea came from personal experience.

Seinfeld and his wife, Jessica, were arguing one day—he doesn't remember the topic—while a friend was visiting. The friend became uncomfortable and wondered if she should leave.

"I said, `You know what, I need some help to settle this right here. I need a marriage ref,'" he said, and the friend obliged.

Seinfeld helped develop the idea with a friend, Ellen Rakieten, who had just left Oprah Winfrey's production company after working there for 23 years.

She brought the problem-solving experience and Seinfeld added the comic sensibility. They don't intend to delve into serious stuff, but smaller things like leaving the bathroom messy. Even, perhaps, about nothing, really.

"I've been married for nine years," Seinfeld said in a phone interview. "One of my favorite things is talking to guys about their marriage. It's so funny because it's not your problem."

Indeed, Rakieten said, "we all fight about the same stuff. When you can look at it in a funny way and realize you're not alone, it takes some of the edge off it."

The hour-long episodes will introduce the couples through filmed reports and show them fighting. A panel of celebrity guests will weigh in to offer advice and observations before the final arbiter, a "ref" who hasn't been selected yet, will settle things.

Being right may not always be the deciding factor, either. The ref will penalize people for fighting dirty, for instance, Rakieten said. Eye-rolling is a technical foul.

Seinfeld and Rakieten flew to California to pitch the idea to Ben Silverman, NBC entertainment chief, 10 days ago and it was accepted right away. "We barely let him leave the building," Silverman said.

Asked when he expected to get the series on the air, Silverman said, "I'd love for tomorrow." They're hoping for next season, but nothing is certain. NBC made an initial commitment of ordering six episodes.

The element of continuity with one of its biggest stars historically is important for NBC, Silverman said. He said he likes the idea that "Seinfeld" was an exploration of the star's single life while "The Marriage Ref" is a reflection of Seinfeld's current comedy about married life.

All of Seinfeld's sitcom costars have tried new TV shows since "Seinfeld" ended, with varying degrees of success.

Pop star Stevie Wonder celebrated at White House

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Barack Obama on Wednesday thanked musician Stevie Wonder for creating "a style that's uniquely American" as he presented the singer-songwriter the nation's highest award for pop music.

Obama, who called Wonder the soundtrack of his youth, gave the star the Library of Congress' Gershwin Prize for Popular Song during an East Room tribute that featured Tony Bennett, Martina McBride and Wonder himself. The president joked that the group was "the most accomplished Stevie Wonder cover band in history."

Wonder was emotional at times, thanking Obama for the award and reflecting on what his election as the first black president means to the United States.

"What is truly exciting for me today is that we truly have lived to see a time and a space where America has a chance to again live up to the greatness that it deserves to be seen and known as, through the love and caring and the commitment of a president—as in our president, Barack Obama," he said.

Wonder cited Martin Luther King Jr., his faith and his mother during an acceptance speech that flowed into a set of Obama's favorite songs. The Grammy-winning musician—he has 25 of the awards—joked that he looked forward to writing more love songs—perhaps a soundtrack for "you know, maybe I'll be a part of creating some more of those babies."

Obama praised Wonder's decades-long career and a style that has blended pop and funk, R&B and gospel.

AP

President Barack Obama presents Stevie Wonder with the Library of Congress Gershwin Award during 'Stevie Wonder In Performance at the White House: The Library of Congress Gershwin Prize' in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2009.

"Stevie has always drawn on the incredible range of traditions in his music and, from that, he's created a style that's at once uniquely American, uniquely his own, and yet somehow universal," Obama said. "Indeed, this could be called the American tradition—artists demonstrating the courage, the talent to find new harmonies in the rich and dissonant sounds of the American experience."

First lady Michelle Obama spoke in more personal terms, calling Wonder "one of the world's greatest artists." She recalled how she and her grandfather would listen to Wonder's albums together.

"He'd blast music throughout the house and that's where he and I would sit and listen to Stevie's music together—songs about life, love, romance, heartache, despair. He would let me listen to these songs over and over and over and over again," she said.

The first album she bought was Wonder's "Talking Book," and she and Barack Obama used "You and I" as their wedding song.

President Obama said he was lucky to have already loved Wonder's music when he first met his mate.

"I think it's fair to say that had I not been a Stevie Wonder fan, Michelle might not have dated me, we might not have married," Obama said, with his wife sitting in the front row. "The fact that we agreed on Stevie was part of the essence of our courtship."

Although the president is a well-known fan—Wonder performed at his nominating convention in Denver last summer and at a Lincoln Memorial concert before his January inauguration—the Library of Congress had decided to honor Wonder before Obama won the election.

The Gershwin Prize honors George and Ira Gershwin and is given for lifetime achievement in popular music. Paul Simon claimed the nation's first prize in 2007.

Wonder's performance will be broadcast Thursday on PBS stations as part of a White House series on the arts.

MC Hammer to focus on family, business in TV show

WISCONSIN DELLS, Wis. (AP)—Viewers of MC Hammer's new reality TV show shouldn't expect to see him lounging around the house in baggy pants.

The 1990s rap music sensation says "Hammertime" will give viewers a glimpse of his 16-hour days as a businessman, computer geek, proud father and husband. The show will air on cable's A&E, starting as early as May.

The show will follow Hammer, his wife of 23 years, five children and two nephews—aged 3 to 21—who live in their Oakland, Calif., area home.

"You're going to see an American family in the current environment of America," Hammer told The Associated Press on Thursday before giving a private concert at a resort. "College. High school. Junior high school. All the things that come along with family in day-to-day life, with the caveat that their dad is also a world-renowned recording artist."

He said the show would have many funny moments but wouldn't be scripted, "which actually makes it a better show."

Hammer, 46, said viewers might be surprised to learn about his business and technological savvy, including his attempts to build what he calls a social media empire. He helped found the media Web site dancejam.com, has unveiled a new iPhone application and frequently tweets on Twitter.

"I'm a 2010 dad. I'm a real techy. I'm a geek on that side," he said. "This is a dad who is connected beyond any kid's wildest dreams when it comes down to the places they'd like to navigate on the Internet."

Hammer, who was born Stanley Burrell, said his children have their own talents that will be showcased. That includes Stanley Jr., a 13-year-old dancer who shares his father's affinity for technology.

ENTERTAINMENT TIDBITS

Fox renews 'The Simpsons' through season 22

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Fox says it's renewing "The Simpsons" for another two seasons, which will secure its place as TV's longest-running prime-time series. Now in its 20th season, "The Simpsons" already had tied record-holder "Gunsmoke." The Western drama series aired for two decades on CBS before it ended in 1975. "The Simpsons" will pass that mark next season. The two-year, 44-episode pickup announced Thursday by Fox will bring the total number of "Simpsons" episodes to 493. The animated comedy about Homer and Marge Simpson, their children and the town of Springfield is not only enduring but much-honored: It's received a Peabody and 24 Emmys among other awards.

Rachael Ray to return to SXSW

NEW YORK (AP)—Rachael Ray is bringing more music and mojitos to the South by Southwest Music and Media Conference this year. The TV talk show host and foodie put on one of the most popular showcases when she made her debut at the massive festival last March. This year, she's signed up the Hold Steady, the New York Dolls, Ra Ra Riot and other bands to perform for her music- and food-filled bash on March 21. Ray says she hopes to "blow the doors off Austin again." The South by Southwest music festival runs from March 18 to 22.

Russell Simmons agrees to child support payments

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Court records show Russell Simmons has agreed to pay $40,000 a month in child support. Los Angeles Superior Court judge Marjorie Steinberg signed off on an agreement Thursday giving Kimora Lee Simmons sole custody of the couple's two daughters, 9-year-old Ming and 6-year-old Aoki. The couple's divorce was finalized in January. Kimora Lee Simmons filed for divorce in March 2008, citing irreconcilable differences. Russell Simmons, the 51-year-old hip-hop mogul, was granted visitation rights and must pay child support until each daughter reaches 19 and a half years of age. The 33-year-old Kimora Lee Simmons has final say on whether her daughters appear on her reality TV show "Kimora: Life in the Fab Lane." A call placed to Russell Simmons' lawyer was forwarded to a recorded message declining to comment.

Robin Williams heading to B'way for 5 performances

NEW YORK (AP)—First Will Ferrell. Now Robin Williams is coming to Broadway this season. The comedian says he will perform his one-man show, "Weapons of Self-Destruction," for five performances at the Neil Simon Theatre, April 28 through May 3. Williams has been on an 80-city tour of the show. The comedian says: "The current state of the country's political and economic climate, while so hard on so many people, has been like gold for a comedian. There's just so much that's ripe for the picking."

Talented teen is swamped by wide variety of activities

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby

DEAR ABBY: I'm a 13-year-old girl—a straight-A student in the eighth grade. Most of my teachers like me, but I am overscheduled.

I do swimming five times a week. To prepare for the Advanced Placement test, I have German lessons every Wednesday. I have orchestra rehearsal every Saturday morning and sailing class every Sunday. I also take private violin lessons that I must practice for.

I love swimming, but if I go less often, I will be kicked off the team. The German class is something my mom insists on, and I don't mind it too much. I like being musical, and my violin teacher insists I play in the orchestra. Sailing is my passion. I am nationally ranked, and it keeps me going.

I manage this schedule, but some time for myself would be much appreciated. Any ideas, Abby?

STRESSED IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

DEAR STRESSED: It appears you excel at everything, and frankly, just reading your schedule makes me tired. While all of your activities will look good on a college application, you do appear to be overscheduled. A talk with a school counselor might help you better prioritize your interests—and that's what I recommend you do before you burn out.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I am living with a great guy. "Phil" is a sweetheart. He has two nice kids, a good job and we are talking about marriage. We travel, have fun and I have never been happier.

Here's my problem: My son, "Danny," a college senior, will most likely need to move back home in May. I love him, but I must admit he is self-centered, depressing and uncooperative. I suppose much of it is his father's and my fault.

Phil does not want Danny to move in after graduation. He feels the decision is not about choosing between him and my son, but about choosing between my son and me.

I can envision a wonderful future with Phil, but I can't imagine telling my son that he is on his own. My heart tells me I'm a mother first and must provide for my son no matter what. In the back of my mind I suspect that if I don't, I'll regret it forever. I see no middle ground. Can you?

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

DEAR IN THE MIDDLE: The first thing that comes to mind is that Danny should move in with his father. If that is not feasible, then you, Phil and Danny must sit down together and talk like adults.

You stated that you live with Phil—not the other way around. If it is Phil's house, he is under no obligation to have your son as a long-term houseguest. If he does agree, he has a right to know that Danny will be there under certain conditions, for a limited period of time and have it in writing.

Among today's realities is the fact that the job market is difficult, and not all college graduates are able to find jobs in their chosen fields. A certain amount of compromise will be necessary on all your parts.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I run a "coupon swap" in my office. Subsequently, at the end of each week, I am left with numerous unwanted coupons. Can you give me any ideas on how to put these "leftovers" to good use?

THRIFTY SHOPPER IN NEW JERSEY

DEAR THRIFTY SHOPPER: Gladly. Donate them to a church, shelter, food bank or a nursing home. I'm sure they would be appreciated.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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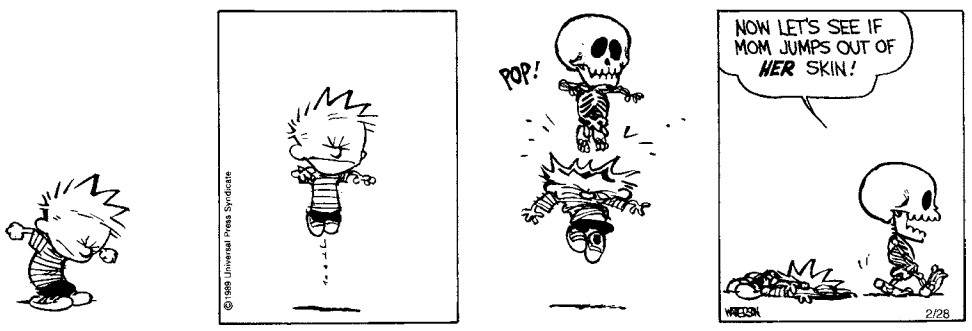
Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



Garfield®

By Jim Davis

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By Bryan Basset

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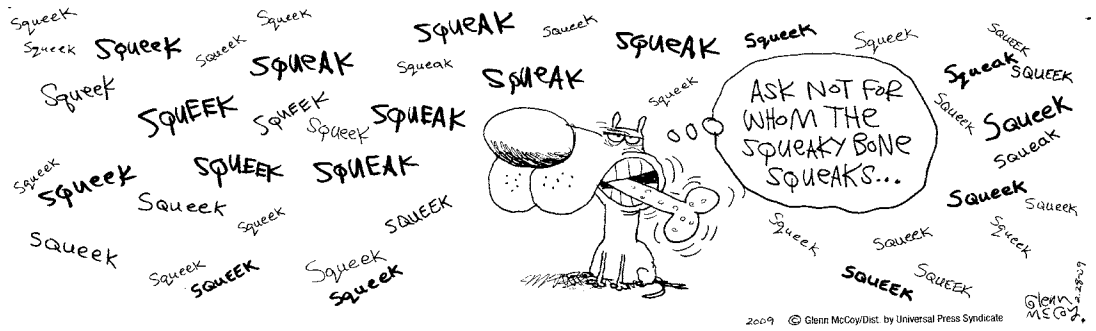
2/28

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 One Obama daughter ...
6 ... and the other
11 Roger Ebert's topic
12 Representatives
14 Pinnacles
15 Spur sound
16 Boom times
17 Crowbar
19 Aries
20 Pensioned (Abbr.)
22 Frank McCourt book
23 Lucy's hubby
24 Firefighting legend Red
26 Certifies
28 Ph. bk. info
30 Thee
31 Actually
35 Happen
39 Eastern bigwig
40 Canal zone?
42 "— Kleine Nachtmusik"
43 "Positively Entertaining" TV network
44 Clear the windows, maybe
46 Somebody
47 Arouse
49 At a particular business place
51 Peyote
52 Curling-iron creation
53 Layered rock
54 Helvetian

DOWN
1 Drenched
2 Zoroastrian text
3 Pack quantity
4 Stiletto, for one
5 Plus
6 Splendor
7 Culture medium
8 Actor Cariou
9 French painter
10 Finally
11 Tierney of "ER"
13 Big rigs
18 Through
21 Jordanian money
23 Wild card, often
25 Sinbad's flier
27 Overly
29 Spire
31 Religious belief
32 Chews the scenery
33 End
34 Lummox
36 Social studies course
37 Joins together
38 What like magnets do
41 Hotel accommodations
44 Two-way
45 Rodents do it
48 — Victor
50 Lanka preceder

Solution time: 27 mins.

S	I	N	G	S	■	B	B	C	■	E	L	M
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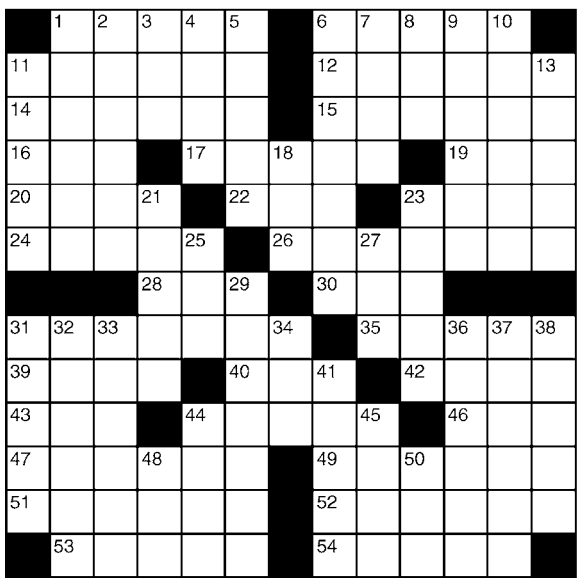
I	N	T	R	O	■	B	A	Y	O	N	E	T
■	■	I	M	B	I	B	E	■	P	U	R	E
B	I	Z	■	S	O	L	■	H	E	I	S	T
O	R	E	S	■	W	E	B	E	R	■	■	■
B	A	N	A	N	A	■	O	R	A	N	G	E
■	■	■	L	I	N	G	O	■	S	E	A	S
R	E	C	A	P	■	R	E	S	■	T	S	P
A	L	U	M	■	S	E	D	A	N	S	■	■
C	A	B	I	N	E	T	■	H	O	U	S	E
E	T	A	■	A	L	E	■	I	N	K	E	D
D	E	N	■	G	A	L	■	B	E	E	T	S

Yesterday's answer 2-28



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Eric Lindros, 36; Robert Sean Leonard, 40; John Turturro, 52; Bernadette Peters, 61

Happy Birthday: You are the grand master of the art of getting what you want this year. You will know how to challenge any situation you face. You are bright and articulate and can win the hearts and favors of people who can help you get ahead. Weigh what it is you really want before you jump in with both feet. Your numbers are 8, 17, 28, 33, 34, 42, 46

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Don't give in to idle threats brought on by emotions. Taking a loving and understanding approach will help to mellow out the situation and allow you to rectify the problem. Don't let discord escalate. ✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Cooperation, restraint and understanding will be required if you are forced to deal with added responsibilities. Someone older may try to take over. Before giving in, evaluate how logical it is to put your life in his or her hands. ✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): Make special plans for the weekend. Good fortune, good times and good results can all be yours if you take charge. An opportunity will develop if you talk to your boss, a professor or a friend who needs a partner with your skills. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): You cannot count on someone to cover your back. Stress in a relationship will cause you to make a decision you may regret. Take more time to see how things unfold before you make your move. ✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): Good things are heading your way both personally and professionally. Network with your peers and you will get wind of something that interests you. A move or change in your living conditions is evident. ✪✪✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): You may have to use a little force to get what you want but, in the end, you will succeed. Pitch in and work hard. A new hobby or activity that takes your mind off your worries will help you in more ways than you realize. ✪✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Don't sit around waiting for someone to call. You have to initiate activities that you enjoy if you want to connect with interesting people. Good times are heading your way and you'll find the security you are looking for. ✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): You have to put things in proper context if you want to avoid making a personal mistake. Emotional deception is apparent. Change can be good but it must be done with everyone's best interests in mind. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Love is on the rise, so open your doors and your heart to someone you care for. The future looks bright if you reconcile anything from the past that you've left undone. You can then move forward without hesitation. ✪✪✪✪

CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Let the past go so you can focus on the here and now. A problem while traveling or discussing family matters will result if you have been wishy-washy about what you can offer. Rethink your motives before you proceed. ✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Love is within reach—all you have to do is make the first move. You will have greater insight into what you are capable of doing and how far you can go. Consider retraining, additional education or starting your own business. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): It's time to put the past behind you and find new ways to enjoy your life. Any uncertainties from the past will be brought to the surface, giving you a reason to reconnect and make things right. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are a go-getter and a charmer. You can be aggressive, outspoken and a little bit stubborn. You are a born leader.

Eugenia's Web sites: ***astroadvice.com*** *for fun,* ***eugenialast.com*** *for confidential consultations*

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

		5		6		1		
			8	5	1			
2								9
	6						7	
5	9						8	4
	3						6	
9								2
			9	1	5			
		1		7		3		

Difficulty Level ★★★★ 2/28

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

6	1	8	9	3	4	7	2	5
9	5	7	1	2	6	3	4	8
3	2	4	5	8	7	1	6	9
2	8	1	7	5	9	4	3	6
7	4	9	6	1	3	8	5	2
5	3	6	2	4	8	9	1	7
8	6	5	3	9	1	2	7	4
4	7	3	8	6	2	5	9	1
1	9	2	4	7	5	6	8	3

Difficulty Level ★★★★ 2/27

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

THE NEW ZEALAND LAMB INDUSTRY **Solution: 9 letters**

R	S	M	T	C	I	R	T	S	S	E	C	O	R	P
T	E	T	A	S	T	E	B	S	S	A	R	G	S	E
R	C	D	E	O	E	I	E	C	N	E	F	E	T	R
S	O	E	N	K	R	R	X	P	P	S	A	L	A	U
Y	S	V	P	E	R	E	C	Y	L	I	R	O	N	T
L	I	E	A	S	T	A	V	A	A	A	M	O	D	S
I	Z	R	L	L	N	N	M	I	G	R	N	W	A	A
A	E	Q	E	E	F	I	E	E	T	O	D	T	R	P
D	(D)	R	U	R	N	L	M	M	N	I	H	S	D	A
T	(R)	E	E	A	U	O	T	F	E	E	D	L	S	C
C	(E)	S	P	S	L	T	B	T	A	L	I	D	A	K
E	(H)	I	H	P	A	I	X	L	L	M	P	G	A	N
L	N	D	L	E	I	Y	T	E	S	T	I	P	Y	A
E	N	O	M	R	O	H	A	Y	T	N	G	L	U	H
S	A	F	E	T	Y	N	S	E	G	N	A	R	Y	S

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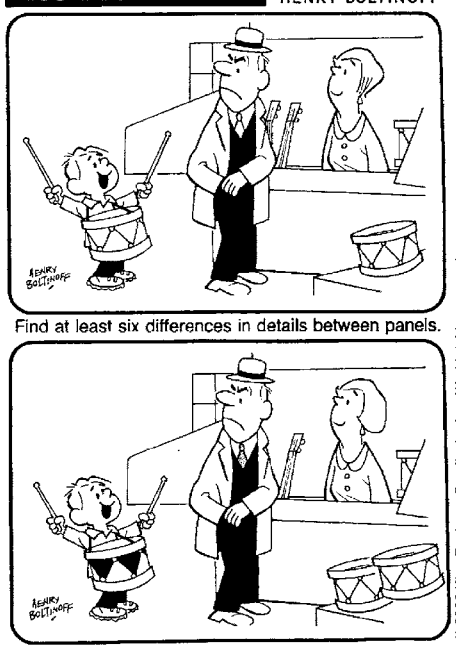
Acres, Additive, Aging, Boneless, Daily, Diet, Family, Farm, Fence, Flavor, Fresh, Grass, Healthy, Herd, Hormone, Hygiene, Inspect, Lean, Lush, Markets, Meat, Mild, Omega, Pack, Pasture, Plant, Process, Quality, Raise, Range, Reared, Ribs, Roam, Safety, Select, Shank, Shipped, Size, Standards, Strict, Supplement, Taste, Tender, Test, Texture, Wool, Yards, Yield

Yesterday's Answer: Builder

We listened to your requests! **TREASURY #6** is the first-ever Wonderword book containing only 20 x 20 puzzles, with 75 of these large puzzles. To order, send check or money order for $10.95 each plus $3.25 p&h ($14.20 total each, U.S. funds only) for the first volume. $1.50 p&h for each additional volume, to Wonderword, Universal Press Syndicate, 1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo. 64106 or call toll-free 1-800-642-6480. Order online at upuzzles.com.

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

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Differences: 1. Woman's hair is different. 2. Drum has been added. 3. Boy's drum is different. 4. Drumsticks are shorter. 5. Man's tie is different. 6. Guitar is missing

Wishing Well®

6	5	7	4	3	5	4	6	2	4	5	2	7
A	S	T	I	P	T	N	N	N	I	I	E	R
5	7	2	5	8	3	6	2	7	3	2	5	2
C	E	W	K	S	R	E	J	A	A	O	T	B
3	7	2	4	3	6	2	8	3	7	8	3	5
I	T	C	T	S	W	O	K	E	Y	I	O	O
6	3	4	5	2	5	3	7	2	3	8	7	5
D	T	I	Y	U	O	H	O	L	E	P	U	U
6	8	6	4	3	4	2	3	8	5	2	6	8
A	N	W	A	R	T	D	S	O	R	B	N	T
7	4	8	5	4	2	7	8	2	8	7	8	4
R	E	H	G	N	E	S	I	N	N	E	G	E
2	7	2	4	7	2	4	5	4	5	4	5	4
E	L	A	W	F	R	L	U	O	N	V	S	E

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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Super Crossword

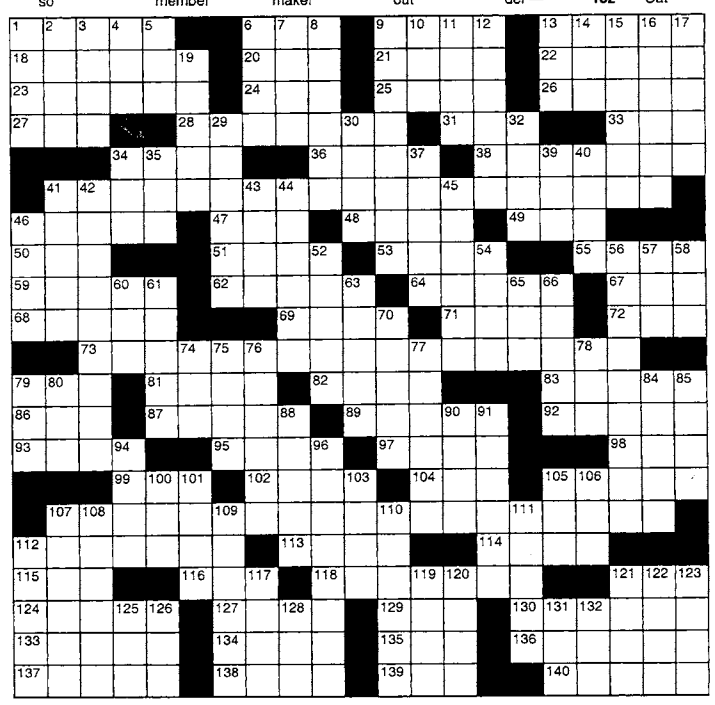
ILL HUMOR

ACROSS

1 Monty Python's Michael
6 Deli choice
9 Gear teeth
13 Film pterodactyl
18 Porthos' pal
20 Team scream
21 Well-ventiliated
22 Felony
23 Start of a remark
24 Funnyman Philips
25 Deep purple
26 Confused
27 Faux —
28 Vince of "Ben Casey"
31 Small shots
33 PC key
34 "Rosanna" rockers
36 Couple
38 Part of HOMES
41 Part 2 of remark
46 Minnesota city
47 Alias initials
48 Heavy metal instrument?
49 Child welfare org.
50 Mil. unit
51 Say it isn't so
53 Labyrinth
55 Relax
59 Gentle as —
62 Abhorrence
64 A Barbary State
67 "Norma —" ('79 film)
68 Buccaneers' headquarters
69 Actress Ione
71 Football's Swann
72 Woodsman's tool
73 Part 3 of remark
79 — Mahal
81 Alley Oop's love
82 Out-of-this-world org.
83 Invasions
86 President Bush was one
87 Overturn
89 Macho type
92 Roast host
93 Circus sight
95 Teri of "Tootsie"
97 — majesty
98 Canterbury quaff
99 Hoagy
102 Wordsworth work
104 ABA member
105 Teach on the side
107 Part 4 of remark
112 Deprive (of)
113 Wooden strip
114 Olympic event
115 Flight
116 Tasty tuber
118 Proposition
121 Carol opener
124 Inevitable activity
127 Hungarian sheepdog
129 Shaq's pack
130 End of remark
133 Daybreak
134 Toast topper
135 Periman or Palillo
136 Bostonian, for one
137 "The Brandon — Story" ('98 film)
138 So. state
139 Stili
140 Self-confidence

DOWN

1 Theatrical Joseph
2 District
3 Neighbor of Thailand
4 Mischief-maker
5 Zilch
6 Make coffee
7 "Rama — Ding Dong" ('61 tune)
8 Legendary athlete Jim
9 Pepper
10 Vinegar's partner
11 Chow
12 Token
13 JVC competitor
14 Terrier's tidbit
15 Win over
16 Audrey Tautou role
17 Peachy-keen
19 Take care of
29 El —, AR
30 Tapered seam
32 Cut a cuticle
34 Decimal base
35 Two — kind
37 Morocco's capital
39 Cable channel
40 Thickening agent
41 Writer Rogers St. Johns
42 Thingumbob
43 Got by, with "out"
44 Disappear
45 Lapis —
46 Part of Q.E.D.
52 Canadian territory
54 "Only Time" singer
56 Destroy
57 Getz's instrument
58 Fairway accessory
60 Speedometer abbr.
61 "Blue —" ('77 hit)
63 Blabby bird
65 Business abbr.
66 — drum
70 One of the Fords
74 Weasel word?
75 First name in fashion
76 Finger food
77 Composer Jean-Philippe
78 "Platoon" setting
79 Gumshoe
80 Chicken — king
84 Apollo's isle
85 Soothsayer
88 Witty
90 Vino center
91 Irritate
94 Punta del —
96 Link
100 Actress Thurman
101 Bunch of birds
103 "Pyramus and Thisbe," e.g.
105 Playground game
106 Luau instrument
107 Confederation
108 January stoat
109 Earl Grey's place
110 William Sydney Porter
111 Man of the cloth?
112 Great time
117 Stubborn sort
119 Hautboy
120 Be bombastic
121 "Kon- —"
122 Summertime treats
123 — -Ball
125 "Sister Act" extra
126 Scholastic abbr.
128 Deighton or Dawson
131 "The Bells" monogram
132 — -Cat



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Trivia test

by Fifi Rodriguez

1. GEOGRAPHY: What U.S. state does the Kennebec River flow through?
2. FAMOUS QUOTATIONS: Who once said, "There's no trick to being a humorist when you have the whole government working for you"?
3. MOVIES: In which movie was the following line uttered and by which character? "Fat, drunk and stupid is no way to go through life, son."
4. ANATOMY: What human gland produces growth hormones?
5. MUSIC: In musical notation, what does the direction "mezzo" mean?
6. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: Of the seven deadly sins, which one is missing from this list - avarice, envy, gluttony, lust, sloth and wrath?
7. ENTERTAINERS: What was comedian Jackie Gleason's famous parting line?
8. LANGUAGE: How would you describe someone who is "garrulous"?
9. TELEVISION: Cult favorite "Twin Peaks" was set and filmed in which U.S. state?
10. TRANSPORTATION: Where might you ride a "vaporetto"?

Answers

1. Maine
2. Will Rogers
3. "Animal House" (Dean Wormer)
4. Pituitary
5. Middle or moderate
6. Pride
7. "And away we go ..."
8. Talkative or chatty
9. Washington
10. Venice, Italy. A vaporetto is a motorboat used for transport in the canals.

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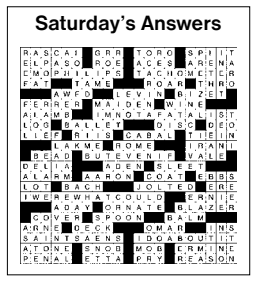
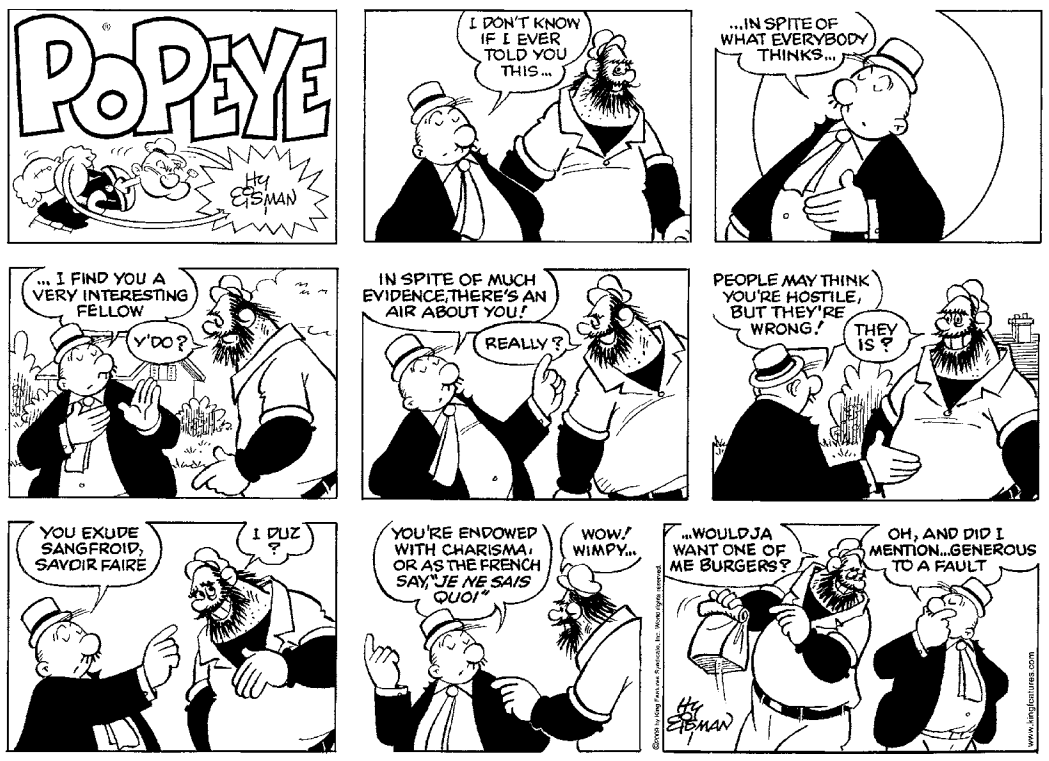
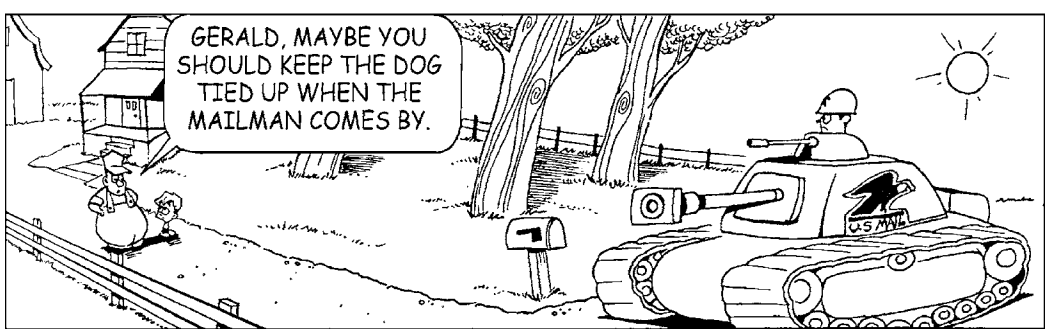
Saturday's Answers



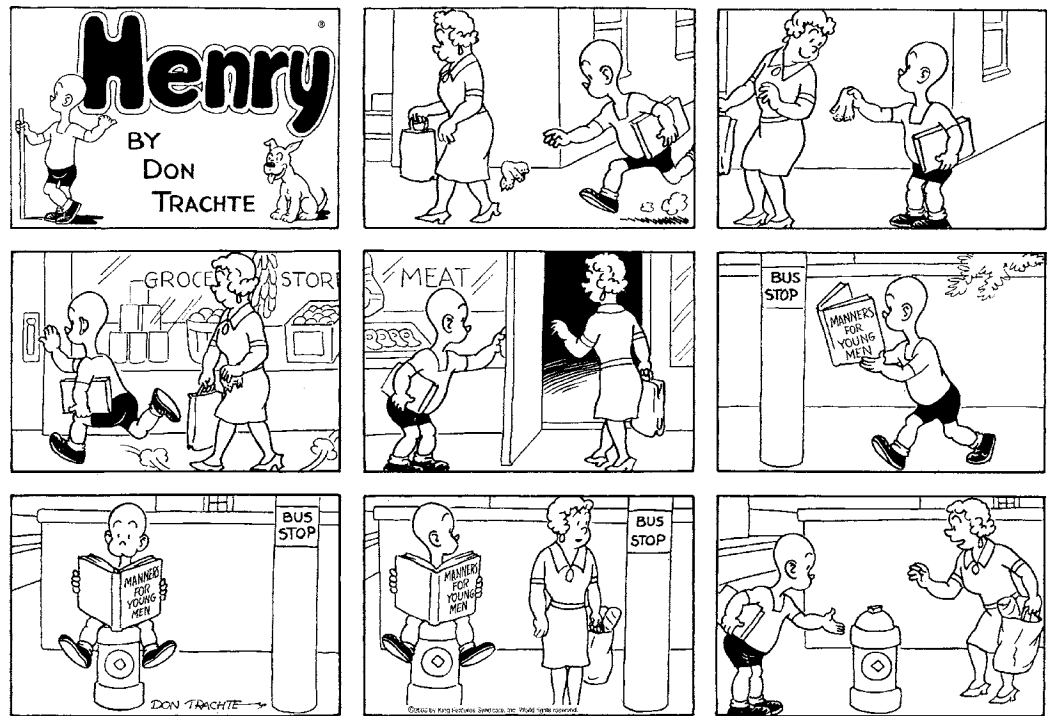

POPEYE
Hy Eisman
I DON'T KNOW IF I EVER TOLD YOU THIS...
...IN SPITE OF WHAT EVERYBODY THINKS...
... I FIND YOU A VERY INTERESTING FELLOW
Y'DO?
IN SPITE OF MUCH EVIDENCE, THERE'S AN AIR ABOUT YOU!
REALLY?
PEOPLE MAY THINK YOU'RE HOSTILE, BUT THEY'RE WRONG!
THEY IS?
YOU EXUDE SANGFROID, SAVOIR FAIRE
I DUZ?
YOU'RE ENDOWED WITH CHARISMA; OR AS THE FRENCH SAY, "JE NE SAIS QUOI"
WOW! WIMPY...
...WOULDJA WANT ONE OF ME BURGERS?
OH, AND DID I MENTION...GENEROUS TO A FAULT

Amber Waves by Dave T. Phipps



The Spats by Jeff Pickering

MARK TRAIL
MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES BELONG TO THE ORDER OF LEPIDOPTERA, OR SCALE-WINGED INSECTS
THERE ARE NEARLY 10,000 SPECIES OR KINDS OF THESE INSECTS IN NORTH AMERICA, MOST OF WHICH ARE MOTHS
NIGHT-FLYING MOTHS, IN SPITE OF THE COVER OF DARKNESS, ARE IN DANGER EACH TIME THEY TAKE WING...
FOR BATS, HUNTING BY ECHO-LOCATION, CAN DETECT THEM EVEN ON THE DARKEST NIGHT
BUT SOME MOTHS ARE PROTECTED BY A THICK COVERING OF FUZZY SCALES WHICH DEADEN THE ECHOES
WHILE OTHERS CAN HEAR THE MAMMAL'S SHRILL CRIES AND MANEUVER TO SAFETY WHERE THE ATTACKER CANNOT FOLLOW
JACK ELROD
THE BEAUTY OF THE MOTH DEPENDS UPON THE COLORING OF THE HAIR-LIKE SCALES ON THE WING AND THE PATTERNS THEY FORM
MOTH SCALES
THE ACTUAL WING MEMBRANE HAS NO COLOR AND IS USUALLY TRANSPARENT



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• 5-Liner	**$35**
• 3-Liner with picture	**$45**
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Classified Ads

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OPINION METER
This week's poll:
With what you know of the CUC situation, do you support the adoption of new

235- NEWS

Rockets hold down LeBron, rout Cavs

HOUSTON (AP)—The Houston Rockets held LeBron James without an assist for the first time in his career and limited Cleveland to its lowest point total of the season, beating the Cavaliers 93-74 on Thursday night.

Yao Ming scored 28 points and Ron Artest added 15 while harassing James on defense most of the night, leading the Rockets to their sixth consecutive victory and ninth straight at home.

James scored 21 points, but went 7-for-21 from the field with three turnovers. He left for good with 4:03 left, the first time in 493 NBA games (counting playoffs) he failed to record an assist.

The Cavaliers had season-low point totals in the first (11) and third (10) quarters, and their 34 percent shooting (27-for-80) was also a season worst.

Mo Williams also scored 21 for the Cavs, who had a five-game winning streak snapped. They also may have lost forward Ben Wallace, who left in the third quarter with a broken right leg.

Von Wafer scored 19 points and Luis Scola added 14 points and nine rebounds for the Rockets. Houston had 25 assists, its sixth straight game with 20 or more, and went 8-for-19 from 3-point range.

Shadowed by the equally strong Artest from the opening tip, James missed three of his first four shots, part of Cleveland's 2-for-10 start. The Cavs double-teamed Yao whenever he touched the ball, but Scola scored eight early points to help Houston build a lead.

James was called for a charge late in the opening quarter when he spun into Shane Battier on a drive. The Cavs went 3-for-17 from the field in the quarter and trailed 19-11.

AP

Houston Rockets' Ron Artest, left, keeps the pressure on Cleveland Cavaliers' LeBron James during the first half of an NBA basketball game Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009, in Houston. Houston won 93-74.

James was resting on the bench at the start of the second period and Williams' 3-pointer from the top of the key ended a six-minute field goal drought for Cleveland.

Kyle Lowry scored on consecutive trips, then assisted on Yao's layup and Brent Barry's 3-pointer as Houston pushed the lead into double digits.

James kept missing shots in the second quarter and earned another offensive foul after bumping into Battier again. He sank a 3-pointer from the wing, his second basket in nine shots, before Artest drove for a left-handed dunk for a 37-29 Rockets lead.

Artest twisted his left ankle with 1:53 left in the first half, but stayed in the game. James drove past him for a layup on Cleveland's ensuing possession to cut the Rockets' lead to 39-36.

But the Cavs shot 31 percent (14-for-45) from the field in the first half and trailed 45-40 at the break.

James sank a jumper from the top of the key 40 seconds into the third quarter, then missed his next two shots. Yao flipped in a hook, then dunked and got slapped by James for his fourth foul.

The Rockets had assists on their first five baskets of the second half and Aaron Brooks' 3-pointer put Houston up 56-46. James tried a no-look, over-his-head pass to Anderson Varejao later in the period, but the ball sailed out of bounds.

The Cavs shot 5-for-17 from the field and coughed up five turnovers in the third quarter to trail 68-50.

James rested on the bench for the start of the fourth period and Cleveland quickly trimmed the deficit to 11. Houston reserve guard Von Wafer drove for a basket, then sank a 3-pointer to answer Cleveland's small spurt.

James returned with 7:21 left, but the Rockets never lost control. Yao blocked James on a dunk and Wafer swished a 3-pointer at the other end for an 85-68 lead.

Lakers 132, Suns 106

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal got together for the first time since sharing MVP honors at the All-Star game. It was no contest, especially without Steve Nash.

The Los Angeles Lakers scored 70 points in the first half and rolled past the Nash-less Phoenix Suns 132-106 Thursday night for their sixth consecutive victory.

Bryant had 22 points and eight rebounds for the Lakers, while O'Neal had 12 points and seven rebounds for the Suns, who trail first-place Los Angeles by 15 games in the Pacific Division.

Ex-Bulls broadcaster, coach Johnny 'Red' Kerr dies

CHICAGO (AP)—Johnny "Red" Kerr, the former Chicago Bulls coach who spent more than three decades as a broadcaster for the team, died Thursday. He was 76.

Kerr died at his home after a battle with prostate cancer, Bulls spokesman Tim Hallam said.

"His name was synonymous with basketball, both here in Chicago, and throughout the entire NBA," Bulls chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said. "Those that were fortunate enough to have known Johnny were touched by both his tremendous compassion for people, and his lifelong passion for the game of basketball. We will miss him greatly."

Kerr's death is a double blow for the Bulls, following the death also Thursday of Norm Van Lier, one of the most popular players in Bulls history. Van Lier was 61.

"We're deeply saddened by the whole course of events today," Hallam said.

The Bulls unveiled a statue of Kerr at the United Center during an emotional ceremony earlier this month that included taped messages from President Barack Obama and commissioner David Stern and speeches from Scottie Pippen and Michael Jordan.

Pippen said Kerr "makes Chicago Bulls basketball what it is," while Jordan called him "an inspiration to me as a basketball player and as a person."

A Chicago native who served as the team's first head coach and received NBA Coach of the Year honors for leading the Bulls to the playoffs in the inaugural 1966-67 season, Kerr also received a photo collage from Bulls GM John Paxson and the Basketball Hall of Fame's John W. Bunn Lifetime Achievement Award from Jerry Colangelo during the ceremony.

"I want to thank everybody here in the audience who has seen the Bulls play not because of Red Kerr but because of Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen and all the other people in the organization," said a choked up Kerr.

Kerr played 12 seasons (1954-1966) in the NBA for the Syracuse Nationals, Philadelphia 76ers and the Baltimore Bullets. From 1954 to 1965, the three-time NBA All-Star appeared in a then-NBA record 844 consecutive games.

He is survived by five children and 10 grandchildren.

Plans to honor Kerr were pending, Hallam said.

Manny Ramirez rejects Dodgers' $25M, 1-year offer

PHOENIX (AP)—Manny Ramirez has rejected yet another offer from the Los Angeles Dodgers. The Dodgers announced Thursday night the star outfielder's agent Scott Boras had declined a $25 million, one-year contract with a $20 million player option for 2010. It was the club's fourth offer to Ramirez this offseason.

"We want Manny back, but we feel we are negotiating against ourselves," Dodgers owner Frank McCourt said in a statement. "When his agent finds those 'serious offers' from other clubs, we'll be happy to restart the negotiations."

General manager Ned Colletti and McCourt met Wednesday in Los Angeles with Boras.

The offer is similar to the two-year, $45 million deal with a buyout or club option that the Dodgers put on the table in November. Ramirez refused the offer and the Dodgers withdrew their proposal. The team came back with a one-year, $25 million offer, but Ramirez turned that down as well. Ramirez also turned down salary arbitration.

"Even with an economy that has substantially eroded since last November, out of respect for Manny and his talents, we actually improved our offer," McCourt said.

"So now, we start from scratch."

A message left with Boras was not immediately returned.

Colletti said there was not necessarily a hard deadline, and that Ramirez was not yet needed in spring training.

"With the season starting a week later, it's a little bit more flexible than it might have been a year ago," Colletti said.

The Dodgers open the regular season April 6 at San Diego.

Ramirez hit .396 with 17 home runs and 53 RBIs in 53 games with the Dodgers last season while leading them to the NL West title after he was acquired from Boston at the July 31 trade deadline.

Source: A-Rod told to keep cousin from ballpark

NEW YORK (AP)—Alex Rodriguez was told by the New York Yankees to keep his cousin away from the team. The message was given to the star third baseman on Thursday, said a person familiar with the situation, speaking on condition of anonymity because the team did not make an announcement. The message applied both to spring training and the regular season, the person said.

Rodriguez also was told the cousin should not be anywhere the team congregates, which presumably includes the team's hotel when it travels and the ballpark.

Speaking at Steinbrenner Field in Tampa, Fla., general manager Brian Cashman said only that the matter of Rodriguez being picked up from his spring training opener Wednesday by his cousin "has been handled."

Rodriguez took a similar tone following New York's 5-1 victory on Thursday over Tampa Bay.

"It's been addressed," he said. "And, no further comment."

A day earlier in Dunedin, Rodriguez homered and walked twice, then got into a SUV driven by Yuri Sucart. He's been identified as the cousin who provided Rodriguez with performance-enhancing drugs obtained in the Dominican Republic. Rodriguez admitted using them while playing for Texas from 2001-3.

Rodriguez acknowledged to the Yankees that having the cousin meet him at the ballpark in Dunedin was a mistake, the person who told The Associated Press about the situation said.

Dan Mullin, MLB's vice president of investigations, was at Steinbrenner Field on Thursday to meet with the Yankees clubhouse staff. Mullin hopes to meet with Rodriguez in the next few days, but the timing of the meeting still was not finalized.

Rodriguez received mostly cheers with a few boos mixed in Thursday, going 0-for-2 and leaving after five innings with the Yankees leading Tampa Bay 2-0. The crowd included Yankees owner George Steinbrenner.

AP

In this Sept. 12, 2008 file photo, Los Angeles Dodgers' Manny Ramirez smiles after hitting a single to load the bases against the Colorado Rockies in a baseball game in Denver. T

Tiger loses in second round to Tim Clark

MARANA, Ariz. (AP)—Just about everything went according to plan for Tiger Woods in his celebrated return to golf. Except he didn't plan on leaving this early. Woods had no complaints with his game or his knee, but he had no answer Thursday for Tim Clark of South Africa, who played 16 holes without a bogey and knocked the world's No. 1 player out of the Accenture Match Play Championship.

So where does Woods go from here?

"I go to the airport," he said

His swing looked as good as it did eight months ago when he won the U.S. Open. His knee felt so strong that when Woods discovered his tee shot into the desert on the 15th hole hit a cart path and went out of bounds—a shot that ended any hope of a rally—he chose to walk 350 yards back to the tee instead of accepting a ride in the cart.

"I knew I had to play out of my mind to beat him," Clark said.

And he did, pouring in six birdies and constantly putting the pressure on Woods throughout a sunny day in the high desert. Clark won, 4 and 2, when he hit his tee shot to 4 feet that Woods conceded for birdie after failing to chip in from off the green.

"I hit it really good today," Woods said. "I just didn't make enough birdies. Tim made some birdies there, and I didn't answer him in the middle part of the round, and consequently I got behind."

Only about 100 fans remained late in the afternoon at Dove Mountain, which surely will lack the energy it had the first two days to welcome back golf's biggest star. Phil Mickelson, the No. 5 seed who survived another scare, is the highest-rated player left in a tournament that is now down to 16 players.

The good news for golf is that it probably won't have to wait eight months to see him again.

Woods likely will play in two weeks at Doral in the CA Championship, although he said he would wait to see how his left knee felt. This was his first tournament since reconstructive surgery on the knee one week after he won the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines in June.

AP

Tiger woods flips his ball to himself as he walks off the green after losing the 13th hole during his 4 and 2 loss to Tim Clark in the second round of the World Golf Championships Accenture Match Play Championship Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009, in Marana, Ariz.

Clark, a pesky opponent with a sharp short game, didn't give him much of a chance.

"I was really working hard to keep myself calm and try to play my own game," Clark said. "I put a lot of iron shots pretty close, and I think perhaps he wasn't expecting that or not. But I don't think I'm ever going to intimidate Tiger Woods, let's put it that way."

Clark, who has four victories around the world but is 0-for-176 on the PGA Tour, next plays a teenager who might be the best hope of bringing some attention back to this World Golf Championship.

Rory McIlroy, the 19-year-old whiz kid from Northern Ireland, birdied his last two holes for a 1-up victory over Hunter Mahan. He would have been Woods' next opponent.

"It would have been great to play him," McIlroy said. "You have to play well to beat Tiger, and obviously Tim did that today."

Woods, the defending champion, had gone 82 consecutive holes without trailing until he caught a plugged lie in a bunker on the sixth hole and failed to save par. He squared the match with a 10-foot birdie on the next hole, and it was tied at the turn.

Then, Clark took over.

Starting with the par-5 11th, he won three straight holes with birdies, and was poised to go 4 up when Woods went bunker-to-bunker on the 14th hole. Woods, however, revived the gallery by blasting out of the sand and into the cup for a birdie to win the hole.

The rally was on. And then it ended.

Woods' tee shot on the 331-yard 15th hit a cart path right of the fairway and headed into the desert. Only when Woods reached the ball did he learn it had gone over a fence and out of bounds.

Even then, he kept it interesting. Woods hit driver for his third shot to 20 feet, and Clark expected him to make it to halve the hole. Instead, the putt missed on the high side, and the match ended one hole later.

Vijay Singh, the No. 4 seed, lost his last three holes and was beaten by Luke Donald of England in 19 holes.

Besides Mickelson, who is coming off a victory last week at Riviera, the only other top-10 players remaining were No. 8 seed Geoff Ogilvy, who won in 19 holes for the second straight day, this time against Shingo Katayama; and No. 9 seed Camilo Villegas, who beat Miguel Angel Jimenez, 5 and 4. Villegas has played only 26 holes in two rounds.

It was a big day for England, which had five players advance to the third round, same as the Americans. Leading the way was Oliver Wilson, who made eight birdies and needed them all in a 2-and-1 victory over Anthony Kim.

Woods wound up playing 32 holes, and said everything felt great—except for losing.

"I was really pleased, walking down these cart paths, and obviously playing and getting into the rhythm of playing," Woods said. "I have no soreness, have no pain. Now it's just a matter of getting back and playing, and playing more rounds."

One shot that gets overlooked is one Clark never expected to make.

He was on the back end of the fifth green, two tiers above the hole, when he jokingly asked Woods to move his marker one spot over. Moments later, however, Clark asked him to tamp down his coin. Then, his putt rolled right over Woods' mark, down the ridge and broke left toward the cup. Clark raised his arm and pointed his index finger as the birdie putt made its final turn.

Woods beat Clark, 5 and 4, in the second round two years ago. That wound up helping the South African.

"I knew what to expect," Clark said. "I knew how I reacted to it then, and I kind of knew a few things that I had to do differently. I just tried to calm myself down."

That wasn't easy on the 14th, when Clark was poised to put him away.

Woods was in the bunker when he holed it out for birdie, and Clark remembered what happened last year when Woods rallied from three holes down with a birdie-birdie-birdie-eagle blitz against J.B. Holmes.

"I figured, 'Well, here we go. It's about to start now,'" Clark said. "I figured the match was probably going to go to 18, even when I was 3-up with three to play. You fully expect him to do something."

Except leave this early.

Official says Vick OK'd for home confinement

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—Imprisoned NFL star Michael Vick will be allowed to finish his sentence under home confinement because there is no room at a halfway house for him, a government official told The Associated Press Thursday.

Vick is serving a 23-month sentence at the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kan., after pleading guilty to bankrolling a dogfighting operation at a home he owned in eastern Virginia's Surry County. He also admitted to participating in the killing of several underperforming dogs.

Vick's lawyers have said they expected him to be moved any day into a halfway house in Newport News. But because of a lack of space, Vick will be released instead to his Hampton home at some point on or after May 21, said the official, who has knowledge of the case but requested anonymity because the individual was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Vick will be on electronic monitoring and will only be allowed to leave home for activities approved by his probation officer, the official said. He is eligible for release in July.

The suspended Atlanta Falcons quarterback's lead attorney, Billy Martin, and agent Joel Segal did not respond to messages seeking comment. Another Vick attorney, Lawrence Woodward, said in a telephone interview that he could not immediately respond.

According to Vick's lawyers, the former Virginia Tech standout plans to resume his pro football career. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, who suspended Vick without pay, has repeatedly said he will review Vick's status after the legal proceedings are completed.

Falcons general manager Thomas Dimitroff said earlier this month that the Falcons will try to trade the contract rights on Vick to another team. Vick, once the highest-paid player in the NFL and among its most popular, has a contract that runs to 2013 and calls for him to receive a base salary of $9 million and a bonus of $6.43 million in 2009. The remainder of the contract is worth $45.11 million, with an additional possible $3 million in Pro Bowl bonuses.

Officials of some other NFL teams have said they are not interested in Vick because they would rather not face the wrath of pet lovers and groups such as PETA, which has been a constant fixture at Vick's hearings.

Vick also earned substantial sums from endorsement deals with Nike and other companies, but that income vanished after the dogfighting revelations virtually destroyed his image and well as his finances. Vick filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in July, claiming assets of $16 million and liabilities of $20.4 million.

Hall, Redskins agree to 6-yr, $54 million deal

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Washington Redskins achieved one of their major offseason goals around the midnight stroke that signaled the start of free agency, agreeing to terms for a six-year, $54 million contract with DeAngelo Hall.

The deal Friday includes $22.5 million in guaranteed money, giving the 25-year-old cornerback his second big payday in as many years. Hall was guaranteed around $24 million in a seven-year, $70 million contract he signed a year ago with Oakland, but he struggled to adjust to the Raiders' man-to-man defense and was waived after eight games.

The Redskins picked him up less than a week later, and he provided a needed boost to a secondary beset by too many injuries and not enough big plays. Hall played in seven games and started the last four, eventually moving ahead of Carlos Rogers on the depth chart.

Hall's five interceptions for the season—three with Oakland, two with Washington—were three more than any other cornerback on the Redskins roster. He has a model citizen during his short time in the nation's capital, avoiding the type of temperamental outbursts that prompted the Atlanta Falcons to trade him to Oakland in 2008.

Hall therefore became a top offseason priority, with owner Dan Snyder wanting to work a deal before the cornerback had a chance to test the free agent market. The negotiations with Hall's agents, Alvin Keels and Joel Segal, went to the last minute—and maybe a little beyond.

With Hall's signing done, the Redskins were expected to focus on free agents from other teams, including Tennessee Titans defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth and Buffalo Bills guard—and former Redskins draft pick—Derrick Dockery. Coach Jim Zorn has said the team will be active in free agency this year, a change from 2008, when Washington uncharacteristically made no major signings.

Macaranas makes NMI proud at world jr. golf tilt

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

With his whole family cheering him on, R.J. Macaranas made some of his best shots and made the CNMI proud by finishing fourth in his division in the recently concluded 2009 Future Champions Golf World Championship.

Macaranas was invited to compete in the 9-10 year-old division against 27 other junior golfers.

All played in eight different venues in California including San Diego, Marcos, Encinitas, Carlsbad, Murrieta, Temecula, Rancho Santa Fe, La Jolla, and La Mesa from Feb. 14 to 16.

The nine-year-old CNMI pride was among four players who carded a two-day total 168 after 36 holes at the tough Doubletree Golf Resort in San Diego. The other three were Alan Tom, Brandon Ahn, and Kaito Onishi.

Sihao Yan won the division by submitting a 159, while Sidney Cozier scored 163 in San Marcos for second place. Macaranas' flight mate Alex Hietala came third with 166.

Some 16 countries were represented in the annual event held on President's Day weekend, including the CNMI, Mexico, Finland, Australia, Japan, South Korea, United Kingdom, China, the Philippines, and host United States.

Macaranas, who turns 10 this month, plans to return to the World Championships next year and aims for a better finish.

His father, Richard, said the Doubletree course is a tough one to tackle. It is 5,286 yards and is a par 72 course with a rating of 71.9, including 125 slopes.

"Weather conditions were cold 50s and 60s, windy, wet rain, and cloudy overcast," he said.

In the first round, the younger Macaranas finished with a 47 for the first nine holes then improved with a 43 at the turn for a first day total 18-over par 90. He managed a birdie and three pars.

His second round performance did the trick after he checking in with a 40 in the front and 38 in the back for a second day total of six-over par 78. He birdied three holes and made seven pars.

R.J. began his great play with a two-under in a four-hole stretch and finished even par in the last three holes.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

R.J. Macaranas tees off in the recently concluded 2009 Future Champions Golf World Championship. Looking on is his father Richard who also served as his caddy.

His father, who personally served as his caddy, said R.J. adjusted well by playing longer clubs.

The father-and-son tandem noticed that the yardages were longer than what R.J. normally hits and even with the tough weather conditions and winds, he made a huge jump by shooting the lowest score coming in and was the clubhouse leader.

He then placed fourth in the final round leaderboard.

"R.J. said he'd bring his 'A' game, when he saw his driver working effectively. He said jokingly, I trained my ball well to stay out of the bunkers and out of the hazards and into the holes. He was constantly in great position strategically while the rest of his foursome were struggling to catch up with his drives. He had one to three strokes ahead on almost every hole," the elder Macaranas noted.

He said his son was so excited that he would run to the next shot, while his family was watching from the gallery. Sharing with the excitement from the sidelines were mom Becky Macaranas, brother Christian Macaranas, grandparents Cristina Hemphill and Randy Hemphill, aunt Sheila Hemphill, and 15 or so spectators.

"On tough holes, R.J. used mantras provided by PGA player and guest speaker at the welcoming party to help him mentally focus. Tiger Woods' 10-yard rule was a favorite. After a bad shot, we can complain and show as much frustration as we can, but after 10 yards from that spot the stroke is never thought of again," he said.

He added that it is also worth mentioning that R.J. played like a champion, because he was "thinking like a champion, and acting like a champion."

Richard wants to network with CNMI golfers who want to qualify for the Callaway Junior World Championship.

"We must gather more representatives for all divisions, from six and under to Championship (17 and under). I need to network with these junior golfers so we can have our own exemptions to the World Championships. Possibly a qualifier on the first week in June in Southern California," he said.

The elder Macaranas can be reached at latu@justice.com.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	46	13	.780	–
Philadelphia	28	28	.500	16 1/2
New Jersey	26	32	.448	19 1/2
New York	24	33	.421	21
Toronto	23	36	.390	23

Central Division

Cleveland	44	12	.786	–
Detroit	27	29	.482	17
Milwaukee	28	32	.467	18
Chicago	26	32	.448	19
Indiana	25	35	.417	21

Southeast Division

Orlando	42	15	.737	–
Atlanta	32	25	.561	10
Miami	30	26	.536	11 1/2
Charlotte	23	35	.397	19 1/2
Washington	13	44	.228	29

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

San Antonio	39	17	.696	–
Houston	37	21	.638	3
New Orleans	34	22	.607	5
Dallas	34	23	.596	5 1/2
Memphis	15	42	.263	24 1/2

Northwest Division

Denver	38	20	.655	–
Portland	35	22	.614	2 1/2
Utah	35	23	.603	3
Minnesota	18	39	.316	19 1/2
Oklahoma City	13	44	.228	24 1/2

Pacific Division

LA Lakers	47	10	.825	–
Phoenix	32	24	.571	14 1/2
Golden State	20	37	.351	27
LA Clippers	15	43	.259	32 1/2
Sacramento	12	47	.203	36.0

Yesterday's Games
Houston 93, Cleveland 74
LA Lakers 132, Phoenix 106

By The Associated Press

LOCAL SCORES

BUDWEISER SOFTBALL STANDINGS

Men's

DCCA	16	0
Beach Boys	11	3
Freedom Air	11	3
Docomo	11	4
CPA	10	2
No Zone	10	4
Joeten Motor Jets	10	4
Legislature	10	5
P&S	6	7
CRM/DEQ	6	7
POI	6	7
DLNR	6	8
CHC	4	9
PSS	4	9
Customs	4	11
PIC	3	9
CUC	3	9
Law & Order	3	10
Mayors	3	12
Hopwood	0	13

Women

NMC	9	2
CUC	5	4
Finance	5	4
DCCA	5	6
CHC	1	9

TORGESON

From Page 28

and 34:39 in ski, and 18:38 and 7:25 in snow shoeing.

"I apparently did not get enough cross country ski practice while on Saipan, and that hurt me in the race. Still, it was great fun," said Torgeson, who was runner-up to Travis Macy (3:52:10).

"My skiing was not so great, but I did not expect much. I did well in the bike leg and thanks to Nate [Hawley], Kieran [Daly], Russ [Quinn], and Kevin and Mieko [Carey] for my bicycling work while on the island," said Torgeson, who used to work as an anesthesiologist at the Commonwealth Health Center.

Torgeson joined 142 other participants in completing the race to the 11,301-foot high mountain

The event started with a 13-mile bike road race through the streets of Grants and began the 1,800-foot climb from Desert Cactus to Ponderosa Pine.

The run up portion is about five miles on gravel roads. The road generally starts out dry but usually turns to snow pack. This part of the course will climb 1,200 feet in elevation.

The cross ski leg is a 1,200-foot climb of the mountaineering ski course that covers two miles. During the final yards of this course, participants must face the infamous "Heart Break Hill" that lies waiting for weary racers.

The snow shoe leg is a one-mile climb en route to the summit of Mt. Taylor. After reaching the top, participants will reverse the four events and race the 22 miles back to the start/finish line.

REZNE

From Page 28

preciate their support for athletic excellence among CNMI athletes. I am very honored to receive this award. I would also like to apologize for not making it to the awards night. I really wanted to be there, but we had to get to Japan at least one day before the tournament to get rest," added Wong, who made record-breaking performance in on- and off-island competitions last year and was a five-time NMASA Athlete of the Month winner.

The Marianas High School student, along with Tsunami Saipan coach Hiro Kimura and teammate Shin Kimura, left Saipan on Feb. 19, the same day NMASA held its annual awards ceremony. Wong competed in the 50th Japan Swimming Championships, which featured Olympic and world championships swimmers.

"I would also like to thank my parents [Ely and Millet Wong] for the dedicated time, energy, money, and overall support they give me everyday as a son and as a swimmer," said Wong, adding that an incident in 2006 involving a family member taught him to always have hope in everything.

"The event that occurred on Feb. 8, 2006, when my father suffered from a sudden cardiopulmonary arrest still lives within my heart and memory. I am very thankful that God gave my father back to us, and I carry that hope not only in the pool, but everywhere I go," Wong said.

He also included in the thank you list his former and current coaches and teammates.

"I would like to thank coach Mike [Stewart] for taking the baton for CNMI Swimming when coach Bill left and the Saipan Swim Club for being my family through all those years," Wong said.

Wong's stint with SSC ended August 2007 after he competed in the FINA World Championships in Melbourne, as he became one of the first swimmers who joined Tsunami Saipan.

"After the World Championships, I never knew if I would ever make it to the top, seeing all those top caliber swimmers so much ahead of me. After a few months of training in Tsunami Saipan, my times started dropping again. I felt better, faster, stronger, and more confident in the pool. Tsunami Saipan revived my dreams so I am thankful to coach Hiro Kimura," Wong said.

"He has made such a big difference in my life, and I cannot express how thankful I am to have a coach like him. He has pushed me, influenced me, inspired me, and coached me to a level that I never expected to reach. I would also like to thank the Tsunami Saipan family for their friendship and encouragement. Lastly, I would like to thank my brother and my friends at school, church, the swim team, and all those who supported me not only in 2008, but throughout my childhood," the 18-year-old swimmer added.

Since Wong will be graduating this year and will be leaving the island to continue his studies, he has a piece of advice for swimmers he will be leaving behind.

"To those aspiring swimmers, live your dreams. It doesn't matter who's the fastest or not. What matters is your heart. Give everything you have not only in practice, but throughout life's challenges," Wong said.

TOUR

From Page 28

Saipan Grand Hotel, Saipan Shipping, Bank Pacific, Pacific Traders Insurance, Coco Restaurant, and Saipan Bike Pro.

"Thank you to the Saipan police department for providing all the support at the traffic lights and intersections, and also for providing the escort and driving the course throughout the race. Their support makes these events safe for everyone," wrote Mylene in an email from Guam.

The Guam stages of the Tour will be held March 14 and 15, after which the overall champion would be determined by their times in all four stages.

The race is for the benefit of the Jazy Garcia Foundation.

Helping out with the technical side of the Saipan races were Johann Sobredo and Liza Gozon, who assisted with registration, setup, and breakdown.

"We truly appreciate their time and dedication. We most especially want to thank our volunteers for getting up so early to help organize and put it all together—Ronald Villafria, Alex Gozon, and Brad Ruszala," the Garcias said.

Also mentioned were the efforts of Fred Camacho and Joshua Berger.

The junior riders, the Garcias also noted, showed their strong performance with Federico Fernandez making waves in the expert division, Andres Halaby surprising everyone in the mountain bike, and Andy Nutting doing well in the novice division.

BEACH

From Page 28

10th places. The three teams have 6-7 records.

Mayor's Office 18, Customs 2

Mayor's Office needed only five full innings to score an upset win against Customs, 18-2.

Despite the loss, Customs has a better record at 4-11, good for 15th place, while Mayor's Office remained at 19th with a 3-12 mark.

Eight of Mayor's Office's 11 batters scored in the top of the first inning, while Customs came up with their two runs in the bottom first.

Joe Tudela, Ernest Kani, and Joe Sablan all went 3-for-3, including three runs each.

Mayor's Office finished with a total of 17 RBIs on 19 hits, including seven doubles and two triples.

Pitcher John Guerrero allowed only four hits, two runs, an RBI, a walk, and issued a strikeout in the win.

In the other game, Docomo won over CRM/DEQ via forfeit. Docomo is now in solo third at 11-4.

Rockets hold down LeBron, rout Cavs

The Houston Rockets held LeBron James without an assist for the first time in his career and limited Cleveland to its lowest point total of the season, beating the Cavaliers 93-74 on Thursday night. 25

Saipan Tribune
Sports

Tiger loses in second round to Tim Clark

Just about everything went according to plan for Tiger Woods in his celebrated return to golf. Except he didn't plan on leaving this early. 26

Torgeson conquers Mt. Taylor

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Former Saipan resident and perennial triathlon winner Eli Torgeson continued to show his might in multi-sports events after finishing second overall among 103 male participants in the 2009 Mt. Taylor Quadrathlon held early this month in New Mexico.

The Mt. Taylor Quadtrathlon was a race up and down the highest peak in Northwest New Mexico. It consists of a bike leg, run, ski and snow shoeing, which is an aerobic activity that involves walking through the snow using snowshoes.

Torgeson, who left Saipan in December after about 16 months of dominating local tournaments, was the fastest in the bike with his time of 45 minutes, 50 seconds, en route to posting the second-fastest time in the race at 4:16:06. He clocked in at 40:35 in the bike down leg, 41:31 and 32:53 in the run (up and down), 34:38

See TORGESON on Page 27

Former Saipan resident Eli Torgeson, seen here approaching the Banzai Cliff station for last year's Hell of Marianas Cycle Century, was a runner-up in the 2009 Mt. Taylor Quadlathon in New Mexico.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Rezne cherishes NMASA Athlete of the Year award

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Fourth of a six-part series

Had Rezne Wong been present at the 2008 NMASA Annual Awards Banquet and was given a chance to thank those who helped him become the CNMI's top swimmer and eventually win the 2008 NMASA Male Athlete of the Year award, he would have had a long list.

"First of all, I would like to thank God for giving me the opportunity to swim everyday, for the strength to have gone this far, and for the love He has shown me in and out of the pool," Wong said.

The Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan swimmer also thanked Saipan Swim Club founder Bill Sakovich, who pushed him to plunge into the pool, 11 years ago.

"I was seven when Mr. Sakovich encouraged me or more likely 'threatened' me to swim for Saipan Swim Club. He never stopped supporting and encouraging me. I will always thank him for believing in me," Wong said.

"I also want to thank NMASA for choosing me as the 2008 Male Athlete of the Year. I ap-

See REZNE on Page 27

DAN KIMBALL

Rezne Wong competes in the 100m breaststroke swim in one of the local tournaments in 2008 at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool in Marpi.

Tour founders promise bigger event next year

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Tour De Marianas founders Jazy and Mylene Garcia are promising a bigger event next year following the success of the Saipan stages of the 8th Annual Jazy Cup.

The husband-and-wife tandem expressed their appreciation to all who supported the two-day event, where 58 riders participated.

A professional cyclist from Japan, Ogasawara Takahiro, dominated the race by winning both the individual time trials on Feb. 21 and the road race on Feb. 22.

"It was a great for the race with sunny but windy weather up and down the hills," the Garcias said as they extended their appreciation to sponsors led by TakeCare, Mair, Mair, Spade & Thompson, Tan Holdings, MR Imaging Group, Toro Bravo Bike Club, and Jazysportswear.

Saipan sponsors and donors were Fiesta Resort Saipan, DFS Galleria, IT&E, Pacific Islands Club, LBT Appraisal, Hard Rock Café, Fomacon Liner,

See TOUR on Page 27

NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.

Riders prepare for the start of the road race of the 8th Jazy Cup Tour De Marianas at the American Memorial Park last Feb. 22.

Beach Boys overcome hardworking P&S

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Beach Boys overcame a sluggish start to turn back P&S, 8-6, on Wednesday night in the Budweiser Inter-Government/Business Slow-pitch Softball League at the Capital Hill Ballfield.

The upset-conscious Beach Boys rallied from a 1-4 deficit after three and a half innings by scoring three runs in the bottom of the fourth to tie the score at 4-4.

They then kept their momentum going as four more batters reached home plate in the bottom of the fifth on the way to the Beach Boys' 11th win in 14 outings.

Darol Atalig scored on a single by Ray Blas, Ota Nobuyuki also reached on a single by Mel Aldan, then Blas and Aldan scored on a two RBI single by Jun Salaula.

P&S got two more runs from Dimas Omar and Ton Reyes Jr. to move to within two, 6-8, in the top of the sixth but that was the best the team could muster as the Beach Boys won in six and a half innings.

With the win, the Beach Boys are now tied with Freedom Air at second place with the two teams carrying identical 11-3 win-loss records.

Oliver Schermidal led Beach Boys' offense, going 3-for-3 at bat with three RBIs, two runs, and a double.

The loss, meanwhile, resulted in P&S dropping into a three-way tie with CRM/DEQ and POI in eighth to

See BEACH on Page 27